PARTISAN REVIEW

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VOLUME XIII, No. 2 SPRING, 1946

FRONTISPIECE		*Pablo Picasso*
FRENCH LITERATURE SINCE 1940	145	*Claude-Edmonde Magny*
FUNERAL RITES	155	*Jean Genet*
PORTRAIT OF THE ANTISEMITE	163	*Jean-Paul Sartre*
THE PRISON	179	*André Malraux*
THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS	188	*Albert Camus*
THE TEMPTATION OF (SAINT) FLAUBERT	201	*Paul Valéry*
POEMS		
Ross Barrier	207	*Julien Gracq*
Explanation of Metaphors	208	*Raymond Queneau*
Da-Sein	210	*André Frenaud*
Hatefully my Love Poetry	210	*André Frenaud*
Legend	211	*Patrice de la Tour du Pin*
Louis Curel de la Sorgue	212	*René Char*
Age of Hearts	212	*Michel Leiris*
And More Changes Still	213	*Henri Michaux*
THE PROVINCIAL PORTRAIT GALLERY	215	*Jean-Paul Sartre*
TWO DRAWINGS	228	*Henri Matisse*
THE GASH	230	*Georges Blin*
MODERN PAINTING AND THE ILL-KEPT SECRET	234	*Jean Paulhan*
BOOKS		
Talent and Career of Jean-Paul Sartre	237	*William Barrett*
The Meaningfulness of Absurdity	246	*Delmore Schwartz*
Frontiers of Criticism	251	*Clement Greenberg*
Poet and/or Commissar	255	*Martin Greenberg*
An International Episode	259	*F. W. Dupee*

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PABLO PICASSO: PAINTING
Paris, 1939
(Courtesy Museum of Modern Art, New York)

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French Literature Since 1940

CLAUDE-EDMONDE MAGNY

It is now some ten years that French literature has been suffering from a guilty conscience. But the state of "distraction" in which we had been living until the outbreak of the war spared us too harsh a realization of this fact. Political concerns had usurped every moment of our attention and the unceasing importation of foreign literature prevented us from seeing ourselves in our own light. But for the past four years France has had to live on itself and the tendencies toward militarism and despair which had hitherto been latent have obsessed its writers. In the same way that an epidemic, developing in a stable environment such as an island, declines and dies out completely once the germs have multiplied to their maximum, so the sickness we suffered from, no longer sustained by infusions of fresh blood from abroad, seems on the way to being cured after having passed through a crisis marked by the appearance of several works concerned with nothingness and despair. One sign of this is Jean-Paul Sartre's *L'Etre et le Néant*—perhaps the only book that does not lead its author down a blind alley and condemn him to silence, and the only one, in addition, that opens up new roads to thought and literature.

It is immediately obvious that all the important works that have come out in these last four years—aside from poetry, which would need a separate study to be dealt with in its entirety—can be easily reduced to a certain unity. This unity has so little of the arbitrary about it that works of literature containing nothing explicitly philosophic—the novelistic efforts of Raymond Queneau and Elsa Triolet, for example, or the poetry of Francis Ponge—can be best understood when related to the common tendency of the literature of this period—a tendency that is more directly expressed by certain half-intellectual and half-emotional essays.

It is significant that the most representative works published since the armistice are not so much novels as books in a rather new genre, half-way between abstract thought and literature. These books sometimes belong to literary criticism, as in the case of *Les Fleurs de Tarbes* by Jean Paulhan and *Faux Pas* by Maurice Blanchot, sometimes to political philosophy—but most often they are what Pascal called "impassioned

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geometries," a phrase Sartre revives to characterize two such books: *L'Expérience Intérieure* by Georges Bataille and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* by Albert Camus. Even novelists now feel that they have to reinforce their stories with philosophical essays—which are occasionally more successful and convincing than the stories in themselves, and for which they serve as a kind of abstract guarantee. *L'Etranger* can hardly be discussed without considering *Le Mythe de Sisyphe,* in which the theme of that novel is transposed to the plane of philosophy.

When critics come to pass judgment on *L'Age de Raison,* the first volume of a trilogy that Sartre intends to dedicate to "liberty" and whose publication has been held up by political considerations, they will hardly be able to discuss it without also discussing *L'Etre et le Néant,* also his plays and novels. Obviously, most of the outstanding writers of today present two faces to the public. One is stern and intellectual, the other physical, overcome by emotion and having an irresistible effect on the feelings of the reader.

Another feature common to all these writers is the deliberate way in which they ignore the prospective reader. They seem to write not so much in order to communicate their thoughts as to conceal them. The studied unreadableness of Maurice Blanchot's two novels is the perfect example of this. One ought to mention Albert Camus' tract in this connection, an essay that, on the contrary, is only too readable and whose seeming transparency perhaps misleads the reader more as to its real contents than does the manifest and intentional obscurity of Blanchot's *Thomas l'Obscur.* Georges Bataille's two books, *L'Expérience Intérieure* and *Le Coupable,* as well as Brice-Parain's *Recherches sur la Nature et les Fonctions de Langage,* are examples in which estrangement between the author and his language is as apparent in the content as it is in the manner of expression. Even a novel like *Les Temps Mêlés* by Queneau is literally *unreadable,* if one give the word "reading" the sense it ordinarily has—that of a basically discursive and, if possible, unobstructed communication between author and reader.

When a work accidentally appears intelligible, it is in reality ambiguous, and the innocent reader is left uncertain of the meaning the writer intended. Such is the case with Jean Paulhan's *Fleurs de Tarbes* and even more so with his *La Clé de Poésie.* Even on the stage, there is a similar abuse of language, in spite of the presence of an audience; a similar disjunction between thought and expression, particularly in the case of Monthérlant's characters who affect a grandeur their conversation never succeeds in reaching. Cocteau's alexandrines in *Renaud et Armide* constitute a very clever imitation of plain language—we are always on the point of getting what the two lovers are saying—but then the illusion fades, the idea slips between our fingers and we are left with only the appearance of a meaning and the shadow of a theory of love.

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One always hesitates to confess one's ignorance and it is the critic who is more afraid than anyone else.

This character of unintelligibility that contemporary literature shows in varying degrees is nevertheless too remarkable to be disregarded. In pointing it out, there is all the less reason to fear being considered stupid, since this esoterism is almost always openly avowed and carefully fostered; in the case of Maurice Blanchot, for example, it is based on a new and extreme conception of the literary work's relation to language and audience.

Rimbaud and Mallarmé now enjoy unlimited reverence, but more for the sake of what they did not write than what they did—more for the sake of the enormously wide margins in which they framed their poems. Similarly, twenty years ago the example of Flaubert's cell at Croisset and Proust's cork-lined room had more influence than the works that came out of those rooms. Each age chooses its own saints to express it. This will-not-to-communicate, which used to be an isolated occurrence, has now become a mass phenomenon in contemporary letters. Only Surrealism, whose stamp has marked, moreover, the majority of present-day writers from Queneau to Aragon, offers the example of an equally open contempt for the public, a similar distrust of literature, a like disrespect for language.

To have the essence of a book consist of its margins and to situate the meaning of poems in the spaces between the words—these are not the only innovations introduced into literature these past four years. The principal philosophic-literary works we have mentioned are often grouped together—not without some injustice—under the name of Existentialism. They are all characterized by an atheism that is occasionally aggressive, as with Georges Bataille, whose proud and desolate lament of a man "bereft of God,"—to use Sartre's phrase—often reminds one of his master, Nietzsche. But this atheism is usually one of indifference, and is easily consoled—or so it would seem—for that "death of God" which was the great event the late nineteenth century contributed to Western thought.

In the last few years Existentialism has become so synonymous with atheism that one remembers with a kind of shock that before the war the term "Existential Philosophy" had been applied almost exclusively to such profoundly Christian philosophers as Maritain, Chestov, Berdyaeff and Gabriel Marcel, whose doctrine represented an effort to think and live Christianity and whose masters—Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Jaspers—had been indelibly marked by religion. Some time ago, while accidentally re-reading *Frontières de la Poésie* by Maritain, where Arthur Lourie's music is called "existential" or "ontological music," I was able to see the extent to which the meaning of the word has shifted, so that one and the same term has come to designate deeply spiritual, fundamentally

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Catholic works of music and such a novel of barrenness and of world without grace as *L'Etranger*. (All this is evidence of an important evolution in thought.) There is, nevertheless, a real kinship between contemporary Existentialism and the doctrines so designated before the war; and in their way of posing problems, there is a particular kinship between Gabriel Marcel's philosophy and certain of Sartre's theses and certain principles shared by Camus, Bataille and Blanchot.

It seems as though Sartre, Camus and the rest had wanted to deprive religion of its basis, wanted to secularize it and organize a kind of anti-clerical revivalism opposed to contemporary religious revivalism. Present-day literature and philosophy are developing to its final consequences that "death of God" heralded by Nietzsche. This is why literature and philosophy are so affective and emotional today: the writer can hardly speak with any calmness after having undergone so upsetting an experience. It is useless for him to pretend to be indifferent and to wish to confine himself entirely to the abstract plane—metaphysical emotion obtrudes everywhere; it rises up behind his every word as water rises to fill footprints left in marshy ground. It colors his entire work and, by making him stumble in the middle of the most abstruse argument, gives his phrases the stammering quality that Bataille's two works have.

At the same time it is only on the most abstract consequences of the non-existence of God that it is insisted, whence the icy character of contemporary atheism, utterly different from the polemical and impassioned disbelief—so close, occasionally, to belief—of a Feuerbach. The essential fact on which Sartre insists, and that which is most evident in his work, is the absolute subjectivity of values; this is the direct consequence of the fact that there is no God to guarantee them. This proposition, which is apparently so abstract, is nevertheless enough, at least temporarily, to reduce man to despair.

What we now have, however, is much more a literature of *disillusion* than of despair (as has been only too complacently repeated). The explanation of this disillusion is to be sought less in contemporary events than in literature's preceding evolution, particularly in the metaphysical and poetic ambitions that filled the period between the two wars—ambitions so extreme that their disappointment was inevitable. The literature of the last twenty years is obsessed by a will to "challenge" man (to borrow a word from Jules Romains), at least as far as his knowledge is concerned, and thereby to enable him to arrive at an extra-human and absolute vision of things. Proust provided us with the means of attaining to the Eternal Present and the Ultimate Truth of Being, as much by the novelistic and stylistic structure of his work as by analysis and interpretation of quasi-mystical experiences. Giraudoux's novels offered us a universe cut to our measure, where man is king and his vision truth.

A similar pride inspires what seem the most disconcerting efforts of

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Surrealism. Surrealism has attempted by means of drugs, dreams, automatic writing, the simulation of clinical delirium and by logomachy to push back indefinitely the boundaries of thought and human imagination, to extend, at least mystically, the ascendancy of man over things. It wanted to transcend the human by human means.

In the work of a poet like Michaux, the publication of whose *L'Espace Dedans* has shown him in his stature at last, the smallest particularities of rhyme, syntax and moral fable reveal a stubborn will to view the world as if man had no part in it.

Not only is the vanity of ambitions inevitably doomed to frustration apparent here, but also their extreme ambivalence. It is indeed strange that man, through love of self, should wish to exclude himself from the universe, even if it were to rid nature of the deforming influence of his presence. Once deceived, moreover, the wish to deify man transforms itself by a natural dialectic into a passionate detestation of the human condition, which suddenly seems like a prison. Humanism becomes, at least temporarily, anti-humanism. This is a stage through which most of today's writers seem to have passed, even those who are now the most determined humanists, such as Ponge or Camus.

Michaux, in *Ecce Homo,* does not exactly engage in what one would call the exaltation of human nature. The inhumanity running through his works from beginning to end, from the tales of cannibalism in *Fables des Origines* to the exploits of the headsman and assassin, Plume, over-balances love of mankind.

Sartre seems to have gone through a phase of passionate anti-humanism whose marks are more or less apparent everywhere in his earlier works. It is this anti-humanism that inspires those vehement pages of *La Nausée* that mock those who "love man," as if it were something pathetic and derisory. The frequency with which the adjectives "obscene" and "unclean" are applied to the human hand, nose or face testifies, if not to a hatred of the human form as firm as that expressed in certain Surrealist paintings and sculpture (Hans Arp's works, for example), at least a resolve to deny all metaphysical and aesthetic prerogatives to what is human.

But the meaning of Sartre's work is seriously misjudged if judged solely on the basis of its first examples. They had to be written in order that Sartre, disburdened by literary creation of hatred of the human, might rediscover an authentic humanism. Man needs years in which to despise himself and his fate, his knowledge must be made to appear a lie, his loves a mockery and his values illusory, before he can come to self-reconciliation and the possibility of again loving himself and his fellow men.

All this represents probably the most severe crisis undergone by the irrepressible anthropomorphism of our species. It was produced by causes emotional in origin—the rebuff administered to inordinate literary

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and philosophical ambitions and, more generally, to inflated conceptions of the powers of man—and at the same time intellectual: the recognition of the insecurity of values, which constituted a philosophical calamity compared to which the eighteenth century's discovery of the plurality of worlds and the nineteenth century's discovery of the origin of species amounted to very little. Kantianism has expended more than a century in developing its metaphysicial consequences to their limit; the remarkable distance this development has gone must be recognized.

The fantasy of Henri Michaux, although of a different nature, makes clear a similar intention to devaluate the world and humanity. In the *Voyage en Grande Garabagne* and *Au Pays de la Magie,* he seeks above all to outline a world in which everything is clear, even transparent, where neither things nor men have any "underside" or mystery, a world which nevertheless has no meaning for us, a universe whose finality is infinite, or at least beyond our reach.

He must escape this fate (in order to know it objectively) and at the same time must remain involved in it (in order to have direct experience of it and because, moreover, it is something he cannot in any case evade). We are therefore far from that easy dogmatism by which Surrealism hoped to make over man and make him surpass himself. The writer was led, however, into these metaphysical blind alleys—which the work of literature itself portrays without abolishing—by ambitions similar to those of the Surrealists.

It is not surprising that literature is despaired of at the same time that it is immoderately exalted, in a situation so destitute of hope as ours in which it is the only outcry that is still possible.

2

The works of Albert Camus best reveal the reasons for the peculiar ambiguity of form that characterizes the literature of these years. If so many writers oscillate between the abstract essay and the novel, sometimes seeking to unite the two—as with Bataille—at other times keeping them rigorously separated—as with Camus—it is because the truth they have in common can be adequately expressed in neither one form nor the other. Gabriel Marcel, before the war, had already put together in one volume a play, *Le Monde Cassé,* and an essay dealing with the ontological mystery, wherein the principal themes of the play are transposed and justified. The dual character of his work is governed by the same reasons as Camus'.

Camus' fundamental attitude, and at the same time that which makes his book truly existential, is his fixed determination to accept as an incontrovertible fact the contradiction that constitutes the basis of existence: he takes the fate of man as his point of departure and reconciles himself to it instead of striving to escape from it, as the religions

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and philosophies have hitherto done; he even ends up by deriving a kind of exaltation from this obstinate loyalty. The error Camus criticizes in the traditional Existentialist philosophies from Kierkegaard to Heidegger is their having always in one way or another evaded the absurd by thinking it. It is difficult to avoid this betrayal if one always keeps on the level of abstract reflection.

Camus has also written a novel (as Marcel, a play) that without doubt expresses better than his essay the particular quality of his vision of the world, thanks to the "opacity" inseparable from the novel form. What he wrote in *Le Mythe* about great novelists can with equal justice be applied to himself: " . . . the choice they made to write imaginatively rather than by argument reveals an idea they held in common: that they were persuaded of the uselessness of every principle of explanation and convinced of the instructive message embodied in the world of sensory appearance." Man is as a matter of fact involved in existence; he is mixed up in it, together with its absurdity and its incoherence, and he is unable to detach himself sufficiently to pass a tendentious intellectual judgment upon it, even if this judgment were to consist simply in abstractly recognizing this absurdity by saying: "The world is absurd." We have no right to formulate such a proposition, because it would be a means of evading the absurd. Here we recognize one of the fundamental principles of Existentialism. In an essay devoted to Kafka, I protested in the name of a similar principle against the improperly intellectual interpretations that have been given to his work and that have falsified its real intentions. It is on the basis of this same principle that Camus, Blanchot and Bataille criticize traditional Existentialism.

A few years ago Gabriel Marcel arrived at a similar position in respect to the specific problem of evil. Evil is for him a question of mystery, and not a problem. Evil is one of our fundamental situations. We are involved in it and are consequently incapable of withdrawing from it sufficiently to pass objective judgment on it. Each time we attempt to do so (and thought cannot help over-reaching itself here) we degrade to the status of a problem that which ought to remain ineffable mystery and, incidentally, lose every chance of reaching a workable solution.

Camus nevertheless escapes from the circle and emerges from the absurd by a moral decision: he becomes a normal man again who eats, drinks, suffers and hopes. Blanchot voluntarily remains imprisoned in it, but he occasionally gives us the impression of being shut up within the four walls of Sartre's "room," in a schizophrenic universe where "things are never dark enough." We do not know, but his imprisonment may be just as much the result of his mythomania as of the workings of a real and universal human fate. His work occasionally gives us a glance into the unfathomable duplicities of metaphysical consciousness, in com-

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parison with which those of moral consciousness which have been so much exploited—are as nothing.

Camus looks sane, healthy and almost simple next to Blanchot. One has the impression that Camus will never return to the absurd again, having said everything he was able to say about it in his novel and his essay. Recognition of the absurd has only been a point of departure for him, even if an indispensable one; having exposed himself "to the world's tender indifference," as his hero says, and got rid of God, thanks to his pitiless verification of the fact of universal incoherence, he will be in a position to rediscover man. Camus plays a role in literature similar to that of Holophernes in Giraudoux's *Judith*—the atheist whose efforts will make a godless world shine more brightly, add fresh luster to earthly things, once they express a reality entirely their own, and make men's affection warmer for the condemned ones of this earth.

By a curious coincidence the two or three remarkable novels that have appeared in these last few years offer heroes of a similar type. In *Pierrot Mon Ami* by Raymond Queneau (but already in *Un Rude Hiver*) and in *Le Cheval Blanc* by Elsa Triolet, the foreground is occupied by characters who are apparently non-entities. Pierrot, Lehameau and Michel have no proper reality or inner life. We come to understand them by means of a description made essentially from the outside (although their method is less implacably strict than the one Camus uses). Such a description strips these personages of all the pretenses by which the traditional psychology of the novel attempted to invest its characters with the appearance of subjective reality. Like Meursault in Camus' *L'Etranger,* they live an apparently pointless life, as if indifferent to everything that concerned them. Things happen that make no impression on them because they themselves are nothing. They never know whether it is love or despair that they are in, not to speak of ever engaging in reflection or making any effort to think of themselves in social terms according to "accepted ideas." The sole reality to which they occasionally attain is a mythic one. The same is true of Pierre Kougard in Queneau's two satirical and poetical works—*Gueule de Pierre* and *Les Temps Mêlés;* and it is also true for Michel, whose entire inner being is made up of a heroic revery on comic strip [*imagerie d'Epinal*] about a white horse (hence the novel's name).

As in the case of Queneau's hero, all these characters really ought to be called Pierrot, the most appropriate name for this simple-minded kind of person. They all possess the same strange innocence. They are not beyond good and evil—at least as society so defines them—but by a curious paradox, and in spite of their complete lack of aggressiveness, they have had the same effect on orthodox criticism as Meursault had on his judges. They have been called abnormal, unnatural and unfeeling beings who would be considered intolerable if they were not, happily, psychologically impossible. They have caused such a flood of indignation

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to be let loose as if the simplicity itself with which they do their deeds—deeds which, considered of themselves, are not horrendous—irritated the collective conscience more than outright defiance.

The obstinacy of the modern novel in depicting such abnormal creatures has been stigmatized as evidence of the profound decadence of our literature. And, in fact, under their harmless appearance, they do conceal a nature alarming enough. The pre-Adamic humanity to which they belong is not the reassuring type of the "noble savage" of Rousseau. Critics have availed themselves of their professional right as "watchdogs" to protest against the scandalous undertaking that is represented by such an attempt to denude man, to "scrape him clean," so to speak, and to rediscover the nothingness which is his profound reality beneath the ready-made clothing of the thoughts and intentions society clothes him in. Such an effort, moreover, is all the more dangerous in that it is undertaken in almost absent-minded fashion, and without any apparent theoretical preconception, by means of the insidious technique of fiction.

The indignation of the critics—and occasionally of the reader—is a defensive reaction and, as such, as legitimate as the sentence passed on Meursault by his judges. Man will put up with anything, except the revelation of the nullity he is and of the vanity of his basic "scheme." While we find criminals and such Balzacian *arrivistes* as Vautrin or de Marsay reassuring, because they are strongly positive in their nature, Meursault and Michel are disturbing because they are literally nothing; because they are our fellows and we too, doubtless, if we were so naively transparent, would come to a realization of our nothingness. "Man is a nothingness capable of God," the mystic, Tauler, said; suppress God and only the nothingness remains to constitute the human reality. It is on this "amputation" that Bataille's two books make their disheartening report; and in the novels of Queneau, Elsa Triolet and Albert Camus we share in this same experience.

Every man who writes contracts a forced marriage with the language he uses. Until recently these marriages had almost always been love matches. Giraudoux's relation to his particular style of rhetoric was certainly an example of this most successful kind of union. (A study of Giraudoux might very well be entitled "Giraudoux, or Happiness Through Language.") His death, which just took place within this last period, now acquires a symbolic significance. With him disappeared the type of writer happily married to his methods of expression.

Contemporary writers have an oddly monotonous style: "agony," "absurd," "purity" and "nothingness" always keep flowing from their pens. "Humanity feels safer on the right note than on the ocean-going vessel," says a character in *Intermezzo*. It is doubtless the trouble they have in finding the right word that makes contemporary writers feel themselves defenseless against the world. Brice-Parain tries to express the malaise he feels toward language by employing a language that is

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itself uneasy. His book sounds much more like the translation of an intuition, which is destined, therefore, to clumsiness because of its translated character, than like the direct and adequate expression of an idea. Its value lies much more in the unquestionable authenticity of this intuition and in all the fully lived experience one senses behind the words, than in the skill with which the argument is developed. We feel that the author is speaking because he must, not because he hopes to achieve success. If he does not choose to remain silent, it is because we cannot dispense with language. Language alone prevents us from losing ourselves in pride or in humility, from mistaking ourselves for God. Thus the unhappy union he had concluded with language, largely for the sake of his thesis, transforms itself in the end into a marriage of convenience.

One perceives here the historically necessary character of this hatred of language, a phenomenon without precedent in a collectivity of writers and which has developed in our literature only in the last four years.

New meanings require new methods. Writers, having voluntarily abandoned the traditional modes of expression, are seeking by various means to reconstitute a new rhetoric, a rhetoric of Nothingness, of the Absurd, of existence-in-one's-situation. But here again literature only *seems* to be caught in a blind alley; the case has really been that a few voluntary victims have had to go all the way in their hatred of language, had to reach a kind of condition of "aphasia," so to speak, in the same way as others have gone all the way in their despair at being confronted with the meaninglessness of the world.

(*Translated by Martin Greenberg*)

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Funeral Rites

JEAN GENET

At the very moment her mistress was stirring in her bed—at just eight o'clock—the little servant walked out of the icy post-mortem room into the radiant sunlight. Just ahead of her was the hearse. The priest had arrived breathless; he was late, but he had come. In these little provincial towns the priest always accompanies the body to the church. When the home of the deceased is too far from the parish house, the priest comes half-way. He and the family, ambassadors of two rival sovereigns, both wonder-working, together decide upon the place, out among the open fields, where death and God are to meet. On this particular morning, the priest was accompanied by two choir boys who walked in front of the hearse, on which had been placed the tiny coffin with its star-shaped wreath made of blue and white beads. As you have surmised the two choir boys, dressed in black cassocks and white surplices trimmed with wide bands of old lace, have the faces of Riton (the younger of the two) and Erik. Behind the hearse walked the little servant, followed by an undertaker's helper.

"A casket is a basket, I am walking behind a basket."

It was very early in the morning when, arriving at the hospital and walking through the outer gates which a sleepy porter had come to open for her, the servant had found herself in a flower-garden festive in the morning sunlight (it was just seven o'clock when she arrived). There, standing in front of the door of the hospital, was the pauper's hearse; it looked to her like the skeleton of the rich man's hearse but she did not mind. Harnessed to it was a rather sorry looking horse, unblanketed. The little servant went inside. The hospital attendant greeted her without any ado. He had been chatting with the driver and the undertaker's man. The driver said to the little servant:

"We're a bit ahead of time; we have until half-past seven for the service."

The servant thought: "So the service is to be held here."

Though she had not voiced this reflection, the driver had heard her, for he added: "I'm talking about the 'Our Father,' which is

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as it should be"; he sniffled, then wiped a drop from the end of his nose with his sleeve. In the noblest part of the little servant, in the part that refused to give way to grief, at the top of her soul, a nervous voice, growing impatient, kept saying: "Keep qui-et, keep very qui-et." But the poor little servant herself heard no more than a whispered sound, and was unable to understand its meaning. Just as one draws a shawl around one's shoulders, so, with ungainly hands cracked by much soap and water, she drew her mistress' black mourning veil close to her body. She walked quietly, in silence.

"I am walking ever so quietly, and on the king's own flower-beds."

Because of her poverty, the wretchedness of her wages, she had to wear rubber-soled shoes. In the blank white room, where the electric bulb had been placed high up in one corner, the sprawling shadow of the little servant, clad in deep mourning, spread its length from the ceiling downward on the wall opposite. The little coffin, into which they had put her baby girl, stood on a rather low trestle, painted black.

"She is asleep, the little dear."

The silence about her was such that she could hear the croaking of the frogs as they jumped and dived in the waters of the foggy swamp which they had not yet abandoned.

Over the coffin was spread a white sheet, on which the nurses had placed the little star made of blue and white beaded flowers sent by her mistress the day before. Above the flowers a chubby little angel, made of pink porcelain, bobbed tremulously at the end of a wire. The little servant muttered a brief "Hail, Mary," then leaned against the wall, the more easily to await the priest. He came. Once they reached the church, the funeral party had to stand aside and wait until last rites had been said for eleven German soldiers killed the day before. They had to wait three hours. Juliette had not been able to sit down.

"People will think I don't feel any grief," she thought.

"People will think I didn't love my little baby."

"For all I know, they will say I killed her."

The small squadron of soldiers who had accompanied their dead comrades to the church looked at the poor little figure in mourning, standing near the ropes dangling through a hole in the belfry. Finally the eleven coffins were removed and taken off to the station, to be put to rest on the other side of the Rhine.

The time spent in the church for absolution was short. The

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skimpy black cassocks, from which several buttons were missing, exposed the fuzzy bare legs of the two choir boys clad in rubber boots of the kind so often seen on the Maquisards in Nièvre; their white lace surplices did not make them look any less masculine. They served the priest the way one would serve a piece of artillery. The server is the one who passes the ammunition. They served with the same faith, the same devotion, the same promptness, whether it was the incense, the holy water, or the responses. At the close of the church service, they walked out at the head of the procession, followed by the priest, the undertaker's helpers, the coffin and the servant in mourning. A sexton came up behind them and closed the church doors. Thus, on this interminable day, began the long night of the little servant's journey from the church to the grave and from the grave to her room.

The horse pulled the hearse wearily. The two choir boys, one of whom was carrying a basin of holy water, were whistling a tune under their breaths. The priest was engaged in a monologue with God. The little servant was perspiring under her mourning veils, in her black garment. For a while she tried to walk as fast as the funeral train, but she soon became so tired that the hearse outdistanced her. Her shoes hurt her. One of them came unfastened, and she did not dare tie it again, since she was not limber enough to bend over, and it would not be proper, on the day of your child's funeral, in the middle of the procession, to rest your foot on a stone, since that would make you stop for a moment and take the cavalier pose of a proud lady going up a fine staircase, and this would take your mind off your grief (or off everything that stands for your grief, which is even more serious), because you would be showing an interest in the things of this world. There are only a few gestures allowed by ritual: you may wipe your tears with your handkerchief. (One is permitted to know that one has a handkerchief, although not knowing it and allowing the tears to run down the face proves that one's grief is far greater; but the servant was too tired to cry.) It is also permissible to cover one's face with a veil. From the hospital to the church, she let her veil down over her face, and as she looked upon the world through a veil of transparent black she saw it as afflicted, dressed in mourning because of her sorrow, and this moved her. Moreover, the veil, by isolating her, conferred a dignity upon her that she had never known in her entire life, and the great heroine of the tragedy was her own person. It was she who had died, and, for the last time, was solemnly treading the path of the living, displaying herself to the respect of

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all—dead though still alive en route to the grave. From the hospital to the church, she was that dead person, taking it upon herself to allow her little girl, and conscious of doing so, to perform the familiar journey for the last time. But, upon leaving the town for the country to go to the cemetery, she put her veil back from her face simply by turning her ridiculous hat around on her head. By that time, walking had become a painful duty—of which she devoutedly wished to acquit herself—but which exhausted her by its difficulty. She felt warm. She unfastened one button near the top of her garment, then, fifty yards further, on another. The funeral train was getting away from her. Nevertheless, she was surprised that she recognized the meadows, the tree groves, the rough stone walls.

"After all, I'm going to the cemetery," she said to herself, "and now that I am so far away from my little girl" (she thought she should never be able to catch up with the hearse) "I can take a short-cut." This she dared not do. Her feet were aching more and more. Soldiers on long hikes say, coarsely: "My dogs are barking." "My dogs are barking," thought the little servant, but she reproached herself for thinking that, as it instantly brought back memories of a lad in the infantry she used to know in a town in the East. Then she turned her thoughts to her daughter; quickly looking up, she saw her so far away that she determined to catch up with her by walking faster: "I'll do it or bust. . . . " The soldiers again came to her mind and again she felt ashamed. All these inner happenings exhausted her.

"It's dreadful to lose a child. And they make me bury her. Anyhow, my baby wasn't just any baby, she was the daughter of a colonel."

"Is the cemetery very far still, sir?" She spoke to the wind, the sun, the stones, to nothing. There was no one near her. The funeral train, going down a hill, was hidden from view. She was alone.

"They are having lunch now. And waiting on themselves. Oh, how tired I am! It's a nuisance to have babies die, and to have to bury them. Couldn't they make soup out of them? They'd cook up quite tender and make a good rich broth." The little servant was saying her rosary, each bead of which was made of vermiculated black wood. This pattern, in relief, made the beads look like a toy, the most frivolous of toys. Is it a fact that grief is greater if you are more conscious of it? You are conscious of your grief when you keep your mind riveted on it, when you never let your attention waver from it, not even for an instant; but then it withers you like a sun looked square in the face, its heat eats into you in such a way that

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for a long time you feel as if your eyelids have been scorched. But there are times too when grief disintegrates your faculties, scatters your mind. The boys back there have an expression for that too. When they see a man all in pieces because of too much suffering, they say: "He's lower than a snake's chin." That is when you suffer, when you cannot keep your mind off your grief, and your actions are surrounded by an aura of lassitude and regret which makes them seem untrue—only a little so, not altogether—but untrue because they do not satisfy you. You are ill at ease about them, though you feel, you know, that it would take very little, just a small shift somewhere in the set-up, to make the whole thing click again. All that is needed, in fact, is for you to act—or to see your actions carried out—in the world inhabited by the person for whom they are performed, that world in which they would no longer have any meaning unless you were compelled by love, one day, secretly to consecrate them to it.

Grief had left the mind of the servant scattered. Rarely did she think of her little girl, but she suffered because she was incapable of performing an act that fully satisfied her. She came to a farm where the gate was ajar. The dog must have taken her for a beggar, or a tramp, for she was limping; he came up to her, sniffed, then began to bark. "If the dog throws me a stone," she said to herself, "I'll bring it back to him between my teeth." Then, facing him, she waved both arms high in the air; the dog, frightened, went away, barking louder than ever. This first violent attempt to bring her gestures into relation with life made her almost automatically gather up her veil, which had blown out like a sail in her sudden about-face, and hold it against her chest. In so doing, her whole body was somehow comforted; she walked with head high and felt a desire to remove her hat for greater physical well-being. Without stopping, she raised her hand, then withdrew it. Instantly, a great weariness descended upon her; she had not, as a result of this gesture, thought more about her baby, nor of her own grief, but she had the feeling that her actions were untrue. They had been performed in the normal, everyday, physical world, whereas she moved and had her being, in that same world, it is true, but a world rectified by suffering. In such circumstances, only certain symbolical acts accord us that sense of plenitude which, in other acts, we are denied.

The poor little servant was unable to think about her child, who had never been anything but a red-faced excrescence of unclean flesh severed from the body of its mother. Two weeks old when she had died! . . . She had not lived for her. But then, a servant does

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not make plans for her child. . . . Hers was more of a physical pain resulting from that sickening amputation: a weight of flesh attached to your breast by its mouth drawn away in death. Her mind did not let her dwell on the memory of her child, which to her had been a shriveled little corpse monstrously joined to one of her breasts by its nails and that dead mouth. . . .

Such were my reflections, during my walk in the sun, on seeing a servant-girl slowly making her way along the road to the cemetery to bury her infant daughter.

(*Translated by Frances A. Lippman*)

HUNGER

For a long time he suffered from it, and from the cold, in a little room for which he was not paying. One night he could no longer endure it. His hunger was such that it could have nourished him. He felt it in his belly—something with the consistency of matter about to be digested. It arose in waves from his belly to his mouth, where it expired, consuming itself for being only a desire. He turned over on his bed and wanted to think of Paulo who had given him the foulard tie, which was hung on a nail in the wall. Friendship was not against the idea that he could get from this scrap of faded silk enough money to buy bread. Whom could he sell it to? It was a souvenir, but Paulo would have understood how his foulard was used to appease the hunger of his friend.

"If I had cut myself on the leg, he would think it all right if I stopped the blood with his foulard, even if the foulard is ruined afterwards."

A call arose in his body, something like the faint twisting of an organ by a delicate hand. He got up. The room was small, in a moment he was at the door and he went out. By these few movements and those he made to go downstairs, he forgot his hunger, but as soon as he was on the avenue, wondering whether to turn left or right, it pounced upon him with the speed of a galloping horse; that is, he felt himself thrown to the ground by a victorious animal who would trample him thus to the end of time. He turned right. The avenue looked sombre. The trees were alive with a glory, an infernal joy. He would have to count on a miracle. On the ground floor of a house, on a window ledge—it was a janitor's apartment—he saw a cat. Riton stopped and without even caressing the animal, took it in

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his arms. The cat did not budge, but joy was already giving wings to Riton, who retraced his path, enraptured by hope and a belly already satisfied. The tomcat was big and fat. The assassination was atrocious.

Riton tried first to kill the beast with a hammer.

Feeling obscurely that he who kills is less guilty when the blow has no direct and continuous share in the murder such as to sanction it at each second, he hurled the hammer. Only the fur of the cat was touched. The cat hid under the bed, but the narrowness of the room allowed Riton to catch it quickly. Captured, the animal wanted to scratch him. It fought. Riton wrapped his left hand in a towel and grabbed the cat by the tail. With his right hand he dealt it a blow on the head with his hammer, but its supple spine allowed the cat the movements of a suspended serpent. He meowed. He felt death near. He knew it was inevitable. Riton wanted to strike again, but he missed his blow. The tool hammered empty air. He struck. Again he missed.

—Bastard!

The scene became silent from beginning to end. Riton struggled silently against the silence itself, peopled with the child's criminal and desperate thoughts and the cat's fear—the cat who had become for him the Enemy by its stubborn will to live despite everything, by the skill of its body to avoid blows, by its fur charged with an animal gentleness, tenderness, protecting the beast, but reaching into Riton's very heart. The sea flooded this whining, whose noise of waves deafened Riton. It was a big grey tomcat that he would have liked to caress. I can see the kid picking up the cat, the cat climbing up to his shoulder, where it would sit in a mournful wake near his face, purring.

Having arisen at the same time as the idea of murder by the hammer, the idea of strangulation now became more definite, but Riton did not want to leave the animal in order to look for a cord. He unbuckled his belt, drew it from the loops of his trousers, and made, with one hand, a running noose. The cat was waiting silently. His foot on the little head, Riton drew on the end of the belt, but he did not strangle the animal, as supple, as lively as ever. Riton was being tossed in the folds of a sleep of heartbreaking softness. He fixed the belt to a nail and hung the cat up; the cat, recovering, scraped the wall, on which he tried to climb. Suddenly a great shudder shook Riton's body, a shudder vaster and more precise as the idea grew that the neighbors lay in watch behind the door, listening against the walls to the course of murder, not because they heard cries, moans, entreaties from the victim, but because the murder itself filled the

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room, like a Crooks tube, with subtle emanations that pierced the walls better than Roentgen rays. Then he recognized the absurdity of this idea, and he continued, with one hand, to strike with the hammer while with the other hand he held up his trousers, which were slipping down. The cat was more alive, its life exalted by danger, suffering and fear. There was still no blood, and Riton was tired of striking it. Then he also became afraid that this animal was the devil who sometimes changes himself into a cat in order to enter human dwellings more easily.

—If it's the devil, I'm cooked!

He thought of taking it down, but he was afraid that the devil, standing on his feet, would split his belly with one crook of his finger. The stories tell how three drops of holy water thrown on the cat are enough to restore to the devil his human shape. There was no holy water in the room, not even a box-wood branch, not even an image of first communion. If he made the sign of the cross? The devil would remain hanging, and maybe he would retain, while taking human shape, the dimensions of the cat. What could be done with a devil's corpse of that size? Then Riton did not dare make a single gesture for fear of making involuntarily the sign of the cross over the cat. Tired, sweating, pale, when he unstrung the cat and put it in a tarpaulin sack, which he closed, he struck with all his strength, with the hammer, on this grotesque, mysterious, and wailing mass. The cat was still alive. When Riton imagined that the head was crushed, he drew out the animal, which was still shuddering. At last, he attached it to that nail in the wall of which I have spoken, and he carved it up. The job lasted for a long time. Hunger, which had disappeared for an instant, returned to Riton's belly. The cat was still warm, smoking, when he cut off the two thighs and set them boiling in a stewpan. Confronting the mutilated hide, the skin turned up like a bleeding glove, he ate several pieces almost raw, tasteless, for he had no salt; and ever since that day, Riton has been aware of a feline presence marking his body—more precisely, his belly, like those animals in gold brocade on the dresses of women of oldentimes. Whether the cat had been sick, or it had become so—and also become enraged—during its torture, or because its flesh had not yet become cold, or because the fight had upset the kid—Riton suffered that night from head to foot. He believed he was poisoned, and he addressed fervent prayers to the cat. The next day he enlisted in the Militia. It pleases me to know that he is thus marked in his innermost flesh by the royal seal of hunger. (*Translated by William Barrett*)

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Portrait of the Antisemite

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

IF A MAN attributes all or part of his own or the country's misfortunes to the presence of Jewish elements in the French community, if he proposes remedying this state of affairs by depriving the Jews of some of their rights or by expelling or exterminating them, he is then said to hold antisemitic *opinions*.

This word *opinion* gives us food for thought. It is the word which the mistress of the house uses to end a discussion that is becoming too embittered. It suggests that all judgments are of equal value, thus reassuming and giving an inoffensive cast to thoughts by assimilating them to tastes. There are all kinds of tastes in nature, all opinions are permissible; tastes, ideas, opinions must not be discussed. In the name of democratic institutions, in the name of freedom of opinion, the antisemite claims the right to preach his anti-Jewish crusade everywhere. At the same time, used as we are since the Revolution to seeing each object in an analytical spirit, that is as if it were a whole which can be divided into its component parts, we look at people and characters as if they were mosaics, every stone of which coexists with the others without this coexistence affecting its inherent nature. Thus an antisemitic opinion appears like a molecule which can combine with any other set of molecules without changing itself. A man can be a good father and a good husband, a zealous citizen, cultured, philanthropic and an antisemite at the same time. He may like to go fishing and he may like the pleasures of love, he may be tolerant about religion, full of generous ideas about the condition of the natives of Central Africa—and still despise the Jews. If he does not like them, people say, it is because his experience has taught him that they are bad, because statistics have taught him that they are dangerous, because certain historical factors have influenced his judgment. Thus this opinion seems to be the result of external causes and those who want to study it will neglect the antisemite himself and make much of the percentage of Jews mobilized in 1914, of the percentage of Jews who are bankers, industrialists, doctors,

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lawyers, of the history of the Jews in France. They will succeed in laying before us a strictly objective situation determining a certain current of likewise objective opinion which they will call antisemitism, a chart of which they can draw up or the variations of which they can establish from 1870 to 1944. In this way, antisemitism seems to be both a subjective taste which combines with other tastes to form the person, and an impersonal and social phenomenon which can be expressed by means of statistics and averages, conditioned by economic, historical and political constants.

I do not say that these two concepts are necessarily contradictory. I say that they are dangerous and false. I might, strictly speaking, admit that one might have an "opinion" about the government's wine-growing policy, that is, that one might decide for this or that reason to approve or condemn the free importation of wines from Algeria. But I refuse to call an opinion a doctrine which is expressly directed toward particular persons and which tends to suppress their rights or to exterminate them. The Jew whom the antisemite wants to reach is not a schematic being defined only by his function as in administrative law, or by his position or his acts as in the legal code. He is a Jew, son of a Jew, recognizable by his physical traits, by the color of his hair, by his clothing perhaps, and they say by his character. Antisemitism is not in the category of thoughts protected by the right to freedom of opinion.

Moreover, it is much more than an idea. It is first and foremost a *passion*. Doubtless it can present itself in the form of a theoretical proposition. The "moderate" antisemite is a polite person who gently remarks: "I don't detest Jews. I simply prefer for such and such a reason that they play a lesser part in the activity of the nation." But a moment later—if you have won his confidence—he will add the following with more abandon: "You see there must be 'something' about the Jews: physically they are irritating to me." This argument, which I have heard a hundred times, is worth examining. First of all it is the result of using logic dictated by passion. For can you imagine someone saying seriously: "There must be something about tomatoes because I can't bear them." Moreover it shows that antisemitism, even in its most moderate and evolved forms, remains a syncretic totality which is expressed by statements that appear reasonable but which can lead to corporeal modifications. Some men suddenly become impotent if they find out that the woman to whom they are making love is a Jewess. Some people feel disgust for the Jew, just as some others feel disgust for the Chinaman or the Negro.

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Thus this revulsion is not based on something physical, since you could very well love a Jewess if you didn't know what race she belonged to, but it reaches the body through the mind; it is an involvement of the mind so deep, so complete, that it extends to the physiological as in cases of hysteria.

This involvement is not provoked by experience. I have questioned a hundred people about the reasons for their antisemitism. Most of them limit themselves to enumerating the faults which are traditionally attributed to the Jew. "I hate them because they are selfish, intriguing, hard to get rid of, oily, tactless, etc."—"But at least you do go with some Jews?"—"Indeed not!" A painter said to me: "I'm hostile to Jews because, with their critical habit of mind, they encourage our servants to become indisciplined." Here are some more precise experiences. A young actor without talent asserted that the Jews kept him from having a career in the theater by always giving him servile jobs. A young woman said to me: "I've had terrible rows with furriers, they've robbed me, they've burned the furs I entrusted to them. Well, they were all Jews." But why did she choose to hate Jews rather than furriers? Why Jews or furriers rather than such and such a Jew or such and such a furrier? Because she had a predisposition to antisemitism. A classmate of mine at the lycee told me that Jews "irritated" him because of the thousand injustices which "bejewed" social organizations committed in their favor. "A Jew got a scholarship the year I missed it and you're not going to try to make me believe that that fellow whose father came from Krakow or Lemberg understood one of Ronsard's poems or one of Virgil's eclogues better than I." But he admitted the next moment that he disdained the scholarship, that it was all a muddle and that he hadn't prepared for the competition. Thus he had two systems of interpretation to explain his failure, like an insane man who in his delirium pretends to be the King of Hungary but when suddenly put to the test admits that he is a shoemaker. His thinking moves on two planes without the least difficulty. Better still, he will succeed in justifying his past laziness by saying that it would have been too silly to prepare for an examination in which Jews are passed in preference to good Frenchmen. Moreover he was 27th on the final list. There were 26 before him, 12 of whom were accepted and 14 were not. Would he have gotten any further if Jews had been excluded altogether? And even if he had been the first of those who were not accepted, even if by eliminating one of the successful candidates he could have had his chance to be accepted, my classmate had to adopt in advance a

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certain idea of the Jew, of his nature, of his social role. And in order to be able to decide that among 26 more fortunate contestants it was the Jew who stole his place, he would apriori have to be the kind of person who runs his life on the basis of emotional reasoning.

It becomes obvious that no external factor can induce antisemitism in the antisemite. It is an attitude totally and freely self-chosen, a global attitude which is adopted not only in regard to Jews but in regard to men in general, to history and society; it is a passion and at the same time a concept of the world. No doubt certain characteristics are more pronounced in such and such an antisemite than in another. But they are always present together and they govern one another. It is this syncretic totality which we must now try to describe.

I stated a few minutes ago that antisemitism presents itself as a passion. Everyone has understood that it is a question of hate or anger. But ordinarily hate and anger are provoked: I hate the person who has made me suffer, the person who scorns or insults me. We have just seen that the antisemitic passion is not of such a nature: it precedes the facts which should arouse it, it seeks them out to feed upon, it must even interpret them in its own way in order to render them really offensive. And yet if you speak of the Jew to an antisemite, he evinces signs of lively irritation. If we remember, moreover, that we must *consent* to anger before it can manifest itself, and that we *grow* angry, to use the correct expression, we must admit that antisemitism has chosen to exist on the passionate level. It is not unusual to choose an emotional way of life rather than a reasonable one. But ordinarily one loves the *objects* of passion: women, glory, power, money. Since the antisemite has chosen hatred, we are forced to conclude that it is the emotional state that he loves. Ordinarily this kind of feeling is not pleasing: he who passionately desires a woman is passionate because of the woman and in spite of passion: one distrusts emotional reasoning which by every means aims at pointing out opinions dictated by love or jealousy or hate; one mistrusts passionate aberrations and that which has been termed monoideism. And this is what the antisemite chooses first of all. But how can one choose to reason falsely? Because one feels the nostalgia of impermeability. The rational man seeks the truth gropingly, he knows that his reasoning is only probable, that other considerations will arise to make it doubtful; he never knows too well where he's going, he is "open," he may even appear hesitant. But there are people who are attracted by the durability of stone. They want to be massive and impenetrable,

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they do not want to change: where would change lead them? This is an original fear of oneself and a fear of truth. And what frightens them is not the content of truth which they do not even suspect, but the very form of the true—that thing of indefinite approximation. It is as if their very existence were perpetually in suspension. They want to exist all at once and right away. They do not want acquired opinions, they want them to be innate; since they are afraid of reasoning, they want to adopt a mode of life in which reasoning and research play but a subordinate role, in which one never seeks but that which one has already found, in which one never becomes other than what one already was. Only passion can produce this. Nothing but a strong emotional bias can give instant certitude, it alone can hold reasoning within limits, it alone can remain impervious to experience and last an entire lifetime. The antisemite has chosen hate because hate is a religion: he has originally chosen to devaluate words and reasons. Since he then feels at ease, since discussions about the right of the Jew appear futile and empty to him, he has at the outset placed himself on another level. If out of courtesy he consents momentarily to defend his point of view, he lends himself without giving himself; he simply tries to project his intuitive certainty onto the field of speech.

A few moments ago I quoted some statements made by antisemites, all of them absurd: "I hate Jews because they teach indiscipline to servants, because a Jewish furrier robbed me, etc." Do not think that antisemites are completely unaware of the absurdity of these answers. They know that their statements are empty and contestable; but it amuses them to make such statements: it is their adversary whose duty it is to choose his words seriously because he believes in words. They have a *right* to play. They even like to play with speech because by putting forth ridiculous reasons, they discredit the seriousness of their interlocutor; they are enchanted with their unfairness because for them it is not a question of persuading by good argument but of intimidating or disorienting. If you insist too much they close up, they point out with one superb word that the time to argue has passed. Not that they are afraid of being convinced: their only fear is that they will look ridiculous or that their embarrassment will make a bad impression on a third party whom they want to get on their side. Thus if the antisemite is impervious, as everyone has been able to observe, to reason and experience, it is not because his conviction is so strong, but rather his conviction is strong because he has chosen to be impervious.

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He has also chosen to be terrifying. One is afraid to irritate him. No one but he knows to what extremes his wayward passions will lead him: for this passion has not been provoked from the outside. He holds it well in hand, he lets himself go as much as he wants, sometimes relaxing the reins, sometimes tightening them. He is not afraid of himself: but he reads a disquieting picture in others' eyes and as he makes his statements his actions conform to this picture. This external model relieves him of the necessity of seeking his personality within himself; he has chosen to be all outside, never to examine his conscience, never to be anything but the very fear he strikes in others: he is running away from the intimate awareness that he has of himself even more than from Reason. But, you will say, what if he were only that way in regard to Jews? If he conducted himself sensibly in regard to all other matters? I answer that this is impossible: here is a fishmonger who, in 1942, irritated by the competition of two Jewish fishmongers who made a secret of their race, picked up a pen one day and denounced them. I was assured that in other respects he was kind and jovial, the best son in the world. But I don't believe it: a man who finds it natural to denounce men cannot have our concept of the humane; he does not even see those whom he aids in the same light as we do; his generosity, his kindness are not like our kindness, our generosity; one cannot localize passion.

The antisemite willingly admits that the Jew is intelligent and hard-working. He will even admit that he is inferior to him in this respect. This concession costs him little. He has put these qualities, as it were, in parentheses. Or rather, they draw their merit from the man who possesses them: the more virtues a Jew has, the more dangerous he is. As for the antisemite, he has no illusions about what he is. He considers himself an average man, modestly average, and in the last analysis a mediocre person. There is no example of an antisemite claiming individual superiority over the Jews. But do not believe for a second that this mediocrity is cause for shame. On the contrary, he is well satisfied with it, I might even say he has chosen it. This man is afraid of any kind of solitude, that of the genius as well as that of the murderer: he is the man of the mob; no matter how short he is, he still takes the precaution of stooping for fear of standing out from the herd and of finding himself face to face with himself. If he has become an antisemite, it is because one cannot be antisemitic alone. This sentence: "I hate the Jews," is a sentence which is said in chorus; by saying it one connects oneself with a tradition and a community: that of the mediocre man. It is also well to recall that by

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consenting to mediocrity one is not necessarily humble, nor even modest. It is just the opposite: there is a passionate pride in being mediocre and antisemitism is an attempt to make mediocrity as such a virtue, to create an elite of the mediocre. For the antisemite, intelligence is Jewish, he can therefore disdain it in all tranquility, like all other Jewish virtues: these are all ersatz qualities which the Jews use to replace the well-balanced mediocrity which they will always lack. The true Frenchman, rooted in his province, in his country, carried along by a tradition of twenty centuries, having the advantage of ancestral wisdom, guided by proved customs, *does not need* intelligence. The basis of his virtue is the assimilation of the qualities which the work of a hundred generations has lent to objects which surround him, *i.e,* property. But it goes without saying that this refers to hereditary property and not to that which one buys for oneself. The antisemite misunderstands the principle of the diverse forms of modern property: money, stocks, etc. These are abstractions, things of reason which ally themselves to the abstract intelligence of the Jew. A stock belongs to no one since it can belong to everyone and then it is a sign of wealth, not a concrete piece of property. The antisemite can conceive of but one type of primitive and land-owning appropriation, based on a veritable magical connection with possession, in which the object possessed and its possessor are linked by a mystical participation; he is the poet of land-holding. It transfigures the owner, endowing him with a particular and concrete sensitivity. Of course, this sensitivity is not addressed to the eternal verities, to universal values: the universal is Jewish since it has to do with the intelligence. What this subtle sense will seize upon is just what the intelligence cannot discern. In other words, the principle of antisemitism is that concrete possession of a particular object magically conveys its meaning. Maurras affirms this: a Jew will always be incapable of understanding the following line of Racine:

*"Dans l'Orient desert, quel devint mon ennui."**

And why can I, mediocre I, understand what the most shrewd, the most cultivated intelligence cannot seize? Because I *own* Racine. Racine is my language and my soil. Perhaps the Jew speaks a purer French than I, perhaps he knows the grammar and syntax better than I, perhaps he is even a writer: it doesn't matter. He has only spoken this language for twenty years, and I have spoken it for two thousand

* Racine's *Berenice.*

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years. The correctness of his style is abstract, acquired; the mistakes in French are in conformance with the greatness of the language. Here we recognize the reasoning which Barrès used against scholarship students. Why be surprised? Aren't these Jews scholarship students? I've done nothing to deserve my superiority and I also cannot lose rank. It is bestowed once and for all: it is a *thing*.

We begin to understand that antisemitism is not simply an "opinion" about the Jews and that it involves the entire personality of the antisemite. We are not done with him yet: for he does not limit himself to furnishing moral and political directives. He is a process of thought and a world-view all in himself. One would in fact be unable to affirm what he affirms without implicitly referring to certain intellectual principles. The Jew, he says, is entirely bad and entirely Jewish; his virtues, if any, become vices simply because they are *his* virtues, the work that comes from his hands necessarily bears his stigma: and if he builds a bridge, this bridge is bad because it is Jewish from the first span to the last. The same act committed by a Jew and by a Christian is by no means identical in the two cases. The Jew renders execrable everything he touches. The first thing the Germans did was to forbid Jews the use of swimming pools: it seemed to them that if the body of a Jew plunged into this water, it would be utterly tainted. The Jew literally sullies even the air he breathes. If we try to formulate in abstract propositions the principle referred to, this is what we would get: the whole is more than and different from the sum of all its parts; the whole determines the meaning and the true nature of the parts of which it is composed. There is not only one courageous virtue which might be indifferently a part of the Jewish or the Christian character as oxygen combines to make air either with azote or argon and combines with hydrogen to make water: but each person, with *his* courage, *his* generosity, *his* own way of thinking, of laughing, of eating and drinking, is an indivisible totality. That is to say, the antisemite has chosen to resort to the spirit of synthesis as a means of understanding the world. It is the spirit of synthesis which allows him to see himself as forming an indissoluble unity with France as a whole. It is in the name of synthesis that he denounces the purely analytical and critical intelligence of the Jew. But we must point out that for some time both the right and the left, both the traditionalists and the socialists, have brought up synthetic principles in opposition to the spirit of analysis which presided over the formation of the democratic bourgeoisie. The same

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principles cannot be valid for both groups. The two groups at least make different use of these principles.

Everything becomes clear if we give up expecting the Jew to behave reasonably in conformity with his interests, if we discern in him, on the contrary, a metaphysical principle which forces him *to do evil* under all circumstances, though in so doing he destroys himself. This principle, as we might expect, is magical: on the one hand it is an essence, a substantial form, and the Jew, whatever he does, cannot modify it any more than fire can keep itself from burning. And on the other hand, since the Jew must be hated and since one does not hate an earthquake or phylloxera, this virtue is also freedom. But the freedom in question is carefully limited: the Jew is free *to do evil,* not good. He has only as much free will as is necessary to bear the full responsibility of the crimes he commits, but not enough to be able to reform. Strange freedom which instead of preceding and constituting the essence, remains entirely subordinate to it, and which is but an irrational quality of it and yet remains freedom!

There is but one creature to my knowledge, as totally free and wedded to evil and that is the Spirit of Evil, Satan himself. Thus the Jew is assimilable to the spirit of evil. His will, contrary to the Kantian will, is one which desires to be purely, gratuitously and universally evil, it is *the will to evil.* Evil comes to the world through him; all that is bad in society (crises, wars, famines, upheavals and revolts) is directly or indirectly imputable to the Jew. The antisemite is afraid of discovering that the world is badly made: for then things would have to be invented, modified and man would find himself once more master of his fate, filled with agonizing and infinite responsibility. He localizes all the evil of the universe in the Jew. If nations wage war, it is not due to the fact that the idea of nationalism in its present form involves imperialism and conflict of interests. No, the Jew is there breathing discord—somewhere behind all governments. If there is class struggle, it is not caused by an economic organization which leaves something to be desired: it is because Jewish ringleaders, hook-nosed agitators have seduced the workers. Thus antisemitism is primarily Manicheanism; it explains the course of the world by the struggle between the principles of Good and Evil. There is no conceivable truce between these two principles: one of them must of necessity triumph and the other be destroyed. Look at Céline: his vision of the universe is catastrophic; the Jew is everywhere, the earth is lost, the Aryan must not compromise, he must never make a covenant.

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But he must be on guard: if he breathes, already he has lost his purity, for the very air which penetrates his bronchi is contaminated. Is this not the sermon of a Cathar? If Céline was able to uphold the socialist theses of the Nazis, it was because he was paid to do so. Deep down in his heart, he did not believe in them: as far as he is concerned, there is no solution except collective suicide, non-procreation, death. Others—Maurras or the Parti Populaire Française—are less discouraging: they foresee a long and often doubtful struggle with the final triumph of good. It is Ormuzd against Ahriman. The reader has understood that antisemitism does not have recourse to Manicheanism as to a secondary principle of explanation. But it is the original choice of Manicheanism which explains and conditions antisemitism. Therefore we must ask ourselves what this original choice can mean for a man of today.

Let us compare for a moment the revolutionary idea of the class struggle with antisemitic Manicheanism. In the eyes of the Marxist, class struggle is in no sense the struggle between good and evil: it is a conflict of interests between human groups. The revolutionary adopts the proletariat's point of view firstly because it is *his* class and secondly because it is oppressed, because it is by far the largest class and its fate consequently tends to become fused with that of humanity, and lastly because the consequences of his victory will necessarily involve the suppression of classes. The aim of the revolutionary is to change the organization of society. And in order to do this he must of necessity destroy the old regime. But this is not enough. First and foremost a new order must be set up. If, assuming the impossible, the privileged class consented to cooperate with the socialist scheme and if one had manifest proof of its good will, there would be no valid reason to reject its co-operation. And if it remains highly improbable that the privileged class would willingly offer its assistance to the socialists, it is because its very position as a privileged class prevents it from doing so and not because of any internal demon which would force it in spite of itself to do evil. In any case, if fractions of this class detach themselves from it and become part of the oppressed class, they will be judged by their actions, not by their essence. "To hell with your eternal essence," Politzer once said to me.

The very contrary is the case with the antisemitic Manichean. His emphasis is on destruction. It is not a question of a conflict of interests but of the damage that an evil power causes to society. Behind the bitterness of the antisemite is concealed the belief that harmony will be reestablished of itself once evil has been ejected. His

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task therefore is purely negative: there is no question of building a society but only of purifying the one that exists. Like the Good Knight, the antisemite is sacred; but the Jew is also sacred in his own way: sacred like the untouchables, like taboo natives. Thus the battle is waged on a religious level and the end of the struggle can only be an act of sacred destruction. The advantages of this position are multiple: first of all it favors sluggishness of mind. We have seen that the antisemite understands nothing concerning modern society, and he would be incapable of inventing a constructive plan; his action cannot be put on the technical level, it remains basically emotional. He prefers an explosion of rage analogous to the running amok of the Malayans. His intellectual activity limits itself to *interpretation*; in historical events he seeks the sign of the presence of an evil power. Whence these puerile and complicated inventions which render him comparable to the real paranoiac. The antisemite, moreover, canalizes revolutionary thrusts toward the destruction of certain men, not institutions; an antisemitic mob would consider that it had done enough if it had massacred a few Jews and burned a few synagogues. It therefore represents a safety-valve for the ruling classes which encourage it. . . . But, above all, this naive dualism is eminently reassuring to the antisemite himself: if it is only a matter of getting rid of Evil, it means that Good is already *assumed*. There is no reason to seek it in anguish, to invent it, to debate it patiently when one has found it, to prove it in action, to verify its consequences and finally to saddle oneself with the responsibilities of the moral choice thus made. It is not by chance that the great antisemitic uprisings hide a kind of optimism: the antisemite has decided about evil so as not to have to decide about the good. The more absorbed I become in combatting Evil, the less I am tempted to question the Good. . . . When he has fulfilled his mission as the sacred destroyer, the Lost Paradise will rebuild itself. For the time being the antisemite is absorbed by so many duties that he has no time to think about it: he is forever on the verge, he fights and each of his outbursts of indignation is a pretext which distracts him from the anguished search for the good.

But there is more to it and at this point we approach the domain of psychoanalysis. Manicheanism masks a profound attraction to evil. For the antisemite, evil is his lot, his "job." Others willl come later who will be concerned with good, if need be. He is at the outpost of society, he turns his back on the pure virtues which he defends; he deals only with evil, his duty is to unmask it, to denounce it, to

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establish its dimensions. Thus we see that he is solely worried about amassing anecdotes which reveal the lewdness of the Jew, his cupidity, his ruses and his betrayals. He washes his hands in filth. One should reread Drumont's *La France Juive*: this book "characterized by high French morality" is a collection of ignoble and obscene stories. Nothing better reflects the complex nature of the antisemite: since he did not want to *choose* his own good and, for fear of being different, allowed everyone else's concept of the good to be imposed upon him, his ethics are never based on the intuition of values or on what Plato calls Love; it manifests itself only by the strictest taboos, by the severest and most gratuitous imperatives. But the thing he contemplates constantly, the thing he understands intuitively and has a taste for is evil. He can thus minutely examine to the point of obsession the description of obscene or criminal acts which trouble him and which satisfy his perverse leanings; but since, at the same time, he attributes them to these infamous Jews whom he treats with disdain he can seek gratification without compromising himself. In Berlin I knew a Protestant whose sexual desire took the form of indignation. The sight of women in bathing suits infuriated him; he welcomed this rage, spending his time in swimming pools. The antisemite does the same thing.

One of the components of his hatred is a deep sexual attraction to Jews. First of all it is curiosity fascinated by evil. But above all, I believe, it is connected with sadism. We understand nothing about antisemitism if we do not recall that the Jew, the object of such loathing, is perfectly innocent, I might even say inoffensive. The antisemite is also careful to tell us about secret Jewish organizations, of terrifying clandestine free-masonry. But if he meets a Jew face to face he is most of the time a weak individual who, ill prepared for violence, does not even succeed in defending himself. The antisemite is not unaware of this individual weakness of the Jew which makes him the helpless victim of pogroms. In fact, this situation delights him. Hatred of the Jew is not comparable to the hatred which the Italians felt for the Austrians in 1830 or to that which the French felt for the Germans in 1942. In the last two cases it was a question of oppressors, of hard, cruel and strong men who possessed arms, money, power and who could do more harm to rebels than the latter could have dreamt of doing to them. The sadistic tendency was not an element of this hatred. But since evil for the antisemite is incarnate in these unarmed and harmless men, he never finds himself in the painful necessity of being heroic: it is *amusing* to be antisemitic. One can

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beat and torture the Jews without fear: the most they can do is to appeal to the laws of the Republic; but the laws are not hard. The sadistic attraction to the Jew which the antisemite feels is so strong that it is not unusual to see one of these sworn enemies of Israel surround himself with Jewish friends. Of course he calls them "exceptional Jews," he says: "They aren't like the others." In a prominent place in the studio of the painter whom I mentioned a little while ago and who in no way reproached the butchers of Lublin, there was a portrait of a Jew who was a dear friend of his and whom the Gestapo had executed. But such protestations of friendship are not sincere, for there is no idea in their conversation of sparing the "good Jews"; and while recognizing some virtues in those they know, they do not admit the fact that their interlocutors might also have met some who were equally good. In fact, it pleases them to protect these few people by a kind of inversion of their sadism; they like to keep before their eyes the living picture of these people whom they despise. Antisemitic women often feel a mixture of repugnance and sexual attraction for Jews. One whom I knew had intimate relations with a Polish Jew. She sometimes got into bed with him and let him caress her breasts and shoulders, but nothing more. She got enormous pleasure from the fact that he was respectful and submissive and also from the fact that she divined his violently frustrated and humiliated desire. She afterwards had normal sexual relations with other men. In the words "a beautiful Jewess" there is a specific sexual connotation, very different from that which is understood in the words "a beautiful Romanian," "a beautiful Greek woman" or "a beautiful American." The phrase "a beautiful Jewess" has a kind of flavor of rape and massacre. The beautiful Jewess is the woman whom the Czar's cossacks drag by the hair through the streets of a flaming village; and the special works devoted to descriptions of flagellation give Jewesses a place of honor. But we do not have to search through esoteric literature. From Rebecca in Ivanhoe down to the Jewess in "Gilles," not to leave out those of Ponson du Terrail, Jewesses have a well defined function in the most serious novels. Frequently raped or beaten, they sometimes succeed in escaping dishonor by death, but that is as it should be; those who keep their virtue are docile servants or humiliated women in love with indifferent Christians who marry Aryans. No more is needed to show the sexually symbolic importance of the Jewess in folklore.

With destruction his function, the antisemite—a sadist pure of heart—is in the depths of his soul a criminal. What he desires and

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prepares is the *death* of the Jew. Of course all the enemies of the Jew do not overtly demand his death, but the measures which they propose and which are all aimed at his debasement, his humiliation, his banishment, are the prerequisites of this murder which they are contemplating: they are symbolic murders. Only the antisemite has a clear conscience: he is a criminal with a worthy motive. It is not his fault after all if his mission is to destroy evil with evil; the *true* France has relegated to him its powers of supreme justice. Of course he does not have occasion to use them everyday, but make no mistake: these sudden outbreaks of anger, these thunderous reproaches which he hurls against "kikes," are so many death sentences. Popular awareness divined this and invented the expression "Jew baiting." Thus the antisemite has chosen to be a criminal—a *pure* criminal: here again he evades responsibilities, he has censured his instinct for murder but he has found a way of satisfying it without admitting it to himself. He knows he is bad but since he is doing evil *for the sake of good*; since a whole people is awaiting deliverance at his hands, he considers himself a sort of bad sacred bull. By a kind of inversion of all values, examples of which we find in certain religions and, for instance, in India, where there is sacred prostitution, it is to anger, hate, pillage, murder and all forms of violence that the antisemite accords respect and enthusiasm; and at the very moment he is drunk with evil, he feels the lightness of heart and the peace afforded by a clear conscience and the satisfaction of duty well done.

The portrait is finished. If many people who willingly admit to hating the Jews do not recognize themselves, it is because they do not detest the Jews. They do not love them either. They would not do them the slightest harm but they would not raise their little fingers to protect them from violence. They are not antisemites, they are nothing, they are *no one;* and since in spite of everything, one must appear to be something, they murmur, without thinking of evil, without thinking at all, they go about repeating some formulas which they have learned and which give them the right to enter certain drawing rooms. Thus they know the delights of creating an ineffectual ripple, of having their heads crammed with an enormous affirmation which appears to them all the more respectable because they have borrowed it. Here antisemitism is but a justification; the futility of these people is, moreover, such that they willingly abandon this justification for any other one just as long as it be a "distinguished" one. For antisemitism is *distinguished,* like all the manifestations of an irrational collective soul tending to create a conservative and

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esoteric France. It seems to all these feather-brains that by repeating at will that the Jew injures the country, they are performing one of those initiation rites which allows them to feel themselves a part of the centers of warmth and social energy; in this sense antisemitism has retained something of the human sacrifice. It presents, too, a serious advantage for those people who recognize their profound instability and who are weary of it: it allows them to assume the appearance of passion and, as is the rule since the advent of Romanticism, to confuse passion with personality. These second-hand antisemites take on, without much cost to themselves, an aggressive personality. One of my friends often cites the example of an old cousin who came to dine with his family and about whom they said with a certain air: "Jules cannot abide the English." My friend cannot remember ever hearing anything else about Cousin Jules. But that was enough: there was a tacit agreement between Jules and his family. They ostensibly avoided talking about the English in front of him and this precaution gave him a semblance of existence in the eyes of his relatives and at the same time gave them an agreeable feeling of taking part in a sacred ceremony. And if someone, under certain specific circumstances, after careful deliberation and as it were inadvertently, made an allusion to Great Britain or its Dominions, Uncle Jules pretended to go into a fury and felt himself come to life for a moment. Everyone was happy. Many people are antisemites in in the same way as Uncle Jules was an Anglophobe, and of course they have not the faintest idea what their attitude really implies. Simple reflections, reeds bent in the wind, they would certainly never have invented antisemitism if conscious antisemitism had not already existed. But they are the ones who, in all indifference, insure the survival of antisemitism and carry it forward through the generations.

We can now understand him. He is a man who is afraid. Not of the Jews of course, but of himself, of his conscience, his freedom, of his instincts, of his responsibilities, of solitude, of change, of society and the world; of everything except the Jews. He is a coward who does not want to admit his cowardice to himself; a murderer who represses and censures his penchant for murder without being able to restrain it and who nevertheless does not dare to kill except in effigy or in the anonymity of a mob; a malcontent who dares not revolt for fear of the consequences of his rebellion. By adhering to antisemitism, he is not only adopting an opinion, he is choosing himself

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as a person. He is choosing the permanence and the impenetrability of rock, the total irresponsibility of the warrior who obeys his leaders —and he has no leader. He chooses to acquire nothing, to deserve nothing but that everything be given him as his birthright—and he is not noble. He chooses finally, that good be ready made, not in question, out of reach; he dare not look at it for fear of being forced to contest it and seek another form of it. The Jew is only a pretext: elsewhere it will be the Negro, the yellow race. The Jew's existence simply allows the antisemite to nip his anxieties in the bud by persuading himself that his place has always been cut out in the world, that it was waiting for him and that by virtue of tradition he has the right to occupy it. Antisemitism, in a word, is fear of man's fate. The antisemite is the man who wants to be pitiless stone, furious torrent, devastating lightning: in short, everything but a man.

(*Translated by Mary Guggenheim*)

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The Prison*

ANDRE MALRAUX

THE LIBRARY at Altenburg was impressive. A central column pushed the Roman arches high up into the shadows where the book-shelves disappeared, for the room was lit only by electric lamps set at eye-level. The night entered through a vast stained glass window. Here and there were a few gothic sculptures, photographs of Tolstoi and Nietzsche, a glass show-case containing letters from the latter to Uncle Walter, a portrait of Montaigne, the death-masks of Pascal and Beethoven (those members of the family, my father thought). In a large alcove, his uncle was waiting for him behind a desk that looked like a kitchen table, deliberately isolated — set on a wooden stand a step high, which permitted him to dominate his interlocutor: from just such ostentatious penury did Philip II in his cell look down disdainfully on the nave of the Escurial.

When the train had stopped my father had seen him on the platform: though he didn't know him, he knew his crutches. Standing very straight, with two retainers beside him, his uncle watched his approach with the curious immobility in which he cloaked his infirmity; a very high collar and a little black tie were visible under the light byronic cape that reached below his knees; gold-rimmed glasses rested on the broken nose of Michelangelo—Michelangelo at the end of a long academic career. . . . A formal welcome in the best manner had been immediately followed by:

"We rise at eight."

To my father's astonishment they had set off on foot. The retainers followed; the solemn outlines of the spruce trees under the

* This is a chapter from *La Lutte avec L'Ange,* the first volume of Malraux's new long novel. The novel is written in the first person, and begins with the hero's capture by the Germans in the Battle of France in 1940. In a prison-camp, he sets out to tell the story of his father's life, which is to afford certain illuminating parallels with his own. The present episode takes place before World War I. The hero's father, Vincent Berger, of a Franco-German family, has been a professor at Constantinople; he is summoned home by the news that his father, Dietrich Berger (the hero's grandfather), has committed suicide. He is met at the family's country home at Altenburg (in Alsace) by his uncle, Walter Berger, brother of the suicide.

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sky where a dark lint of clouds was formed by the evil summer wind, the horses' steps and the muffled creaking of the carriage behind were in tone with the silent advance of the rubber-tipped crutches. Some four hundred yards ahead of them the priory, toward which all the dark lines of the valley converged, had finally appeared, its beauty massive and austere. Walter Berger, leaning on his left crutch, had extended his right arm:

"There it is." And modestly: "A barn. Just a barn."

What would the chateau be! my father thought.

"It's a barn. . . ." Walter had repeated, scorning any reply. And they had finally gotten into the carriage.

Walter looked at the barely illuminated portraits and the rows of books in the shadows, as though expecting this cloister of the mind to lift my father to a state of grace. The light struck his face from below, accentuating its quality of unfinished sculpture. He had taken off his glasses and the low light that threw its contours into relief created an illusion of his dead brother's face. This was the man that my grandfather, after a rupture of fifteen years, had wanted as his executor—and it was to send them to him that he had bought the journals that spoke of my father's activity in Turkey.

"I loved Dietrich," Walter said as though bestowing an honor, but not without emotion.

There was in his voice, as in his regard, something absent—as if he had been afraid of committing himself by what he said, or as if his remark had not quite distracted him from some meditation. However, he inquired:

"He had poison ready, I was told, in case the veronal should not . . . be effective!"

"There was a little vial of strychnine on the bedside table. But the revolver was under the bolster too, uncocked."

Standing every week for so many years, at the same hour, at the same place outside the church. . . .

Walter nearly began a sentence, stopped, finally decided:

"Would you be able to illuminate me—I say only: illuminate me—as to the reasons that might have . . . impelled Dietrich to this . . . accident?"

"No. I should even say: on the contrary. Two days before his death we dined together; we happened by chance to talk about Napoleon. He asked me, rather ironically: 'If you could choose a life, whose would you choose?' 'And you?' He thought about it quite a while and all of a sudden said, gravely: 'Well you know, really,

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no matter what happens, if I could live over another life I wouldn't want to be anyone but Dietrich Berger.' . . . "

"I wouldn't want to be anyone but Dietrich Berger," Walter repeated softly. "It is possible for man to care deeply—fanatically—about his own self, even when he is already separated from life. . . ."

From outside, through the rainy evening, came the idiot cries of the chickens. Walter reached his hand toward my father, questioningly:

"And you have no reason to think that during the day that followed, some . . . happening. . . ."

"The suicide was in the 'no matter what happens'."

"Just the same, you didn't suspect anything? (I say only: suspect. . . .)"

He said: suspect; that was all, simply suspect; nothing more than suspect.

"I was convinced that people who talk about suicide never kill themselves."

The man, my father thought bitterly, to whom my few moments of success or happiness gave more joy or pride than to any other in the world.

Walter murmured in a tone of recollection, the immobility of his mouth accentuated by the low light:

"Still one does recognize death, when it has struck often before. . . . "

"I had never seen a man die to whom I was attached."

"But those Balkan peoples . . . violent, agitated. . . . "

"I have come from Central Asia. The life of the Moslems is a stroke of chance in the universal destiny: they never commit suicide. It's true I have seen many of them die, in Tripolitania. But the ones I saw die were not my friends."

Outside, the drops crackled on the flat leaves of the spindle-trees, as on paper; at regular intervals a heavier drop, falling from some gutter, resounded.

"When I was a child," Walter said in a low voice, "I was very much afraid of death. Every year that has brought me closer to it has brought me closer to indifference in regard to it. . . . It was Joubert, I think who said, 'The evening of life brings with it its lamp'."

My father didn't reply. He was sure that Walter was lying; he could feel anguish breaking through.

"Why," said Walter, "did Dietrich wish to be buried as a Catholic? It's strange—I say only: strange . . .—and hardly recon-

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cilable with suicide. He knew that the Church grants religious burial to suicides only in so far as it admits their . . . irresponsibility."

He seemed jealous of the resoluteness with which his brother had died—and at the same time, proud.

"Irresponsibility was not his strong point. But after all, he rejected the Church, not the sacraments."

My father hesitated, then went on:

"I believe what happened must have been very painful. You know that the will was sealed. The sentence: 'My formal wish is to be buried as a Catholic,' was written on a separate page and was found on the bedside table where the strychnine was; but the first version had been: *'My formal wish is not to be buried as a Catholic.'* He crossed out the negative later, drawing a large number of lines through it. Probably he hadn't the strength any longer to tear the paper up and write over again."

"Fear?" Walter suggested.

"Or the end of revolt: humility."

"And besides, what does one ever know? In essentials, man is what he conceals. . . . "

Walter shrugged his shoulders and brought his aged hands together, as children do to make a mud-pie:

"A pitiful little heap of secrets. . . . "

"Man is what he does!" my father replied almost brutally. Temperamentally, he was exasperated by what he called, as though speaking of pick-pocketing, the psychology-of-secrets. Assuming that my grandfather's suicide had had a "cause," that cause, whether the most banal or the saddest of secrets, was less significant than the strychnine and the revolver—than the resolution by which he had *chosen* death, a death that resembled his life.

"In the realm of secrets," he went on in a more moderate tone, "men are a little too easily equal."

"Yes, you are what is called, I believe, a man of action. . . . "

"It is not action that has made me understand that in essentials, as you put it, man is higher than his secrets."

From the funeral room he saw again the bed, mussed by the men from the hospital who had just taken the body away, and timidly straightened out by Jeanne, with the hollow in it like that of a sleeper; the electricity was still on, as though no one—not even himself—had dared to drive away death by pulling back the curtains. In the half-open closet he saw a little birthday spruce, with all its tiny

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candles. . . . There was an ash-tray on the night table: in it were three cigarette butts: my grandfather had smoked either before he took the veronal, or before he fell asleep. On the edge of the ash-tray, an ant was running. It had gone on following its course in a straight line, climbed up on the revolver lying there. Except for a distant automobile horn, and the clop-clop of a carriage in the street, my father heard only the indifferent noise of the little traveling-clock, still going. Mechanical and living like that scratching, all over the earth there stretched the order of the communities of insects, below man's mysterious freedom. Death was there, in the troubling light given off by electric bulbs when one has become aware of daylight beyond the curtains, and the imperceptible trace that people leave who dispose of corpses; from the side of the living came the continual noise of the horn, the sound of the horse's steps receding, the morning calls of birds, human voices—stifled, alien. At that hour, near Kaboul, near Samarkand, the donkey caravans were slowly proceeding, hoofs and stamping lost in Moslem tedium.

The human adventure, the earth. And all that, like his father's finished life, could have been other. . . . He felt himself little by little invaded by an unknown feeling, as he had been on the nocturnal heights of Asia by the presence of the sacred, while around him the padded wings of the little sand-owls beat silently. . . . It was again, but far deeper, the agonizing freedom of that evening in Marseilles, when he watched the shadows sliding in a tenuous odor of cigarettes and absinthe,—when Europe was so foreign to him, and he watched it, as freed from time he might have watched an hour from a distant past slide by, with all its unaccustomed retinue. So now he felt all of life itself become unaccustomed; and thereby he found himself suddenly released—mysteriously foreign to the earth and surprised by it, as he had been after his home-coming by that street where the men of his race slid by in the green hour. . . .

He had finally pulled the curtains. Beyond the classic scrollwork of the great iron door the leaves were the bright green of early summer; a little farther began the darker foliage, down to the almost black lines of the spruce. He became conscious of imagining that all that vegetation was violent.

Like a single human fate, the whole of life was an adventure. He looked at the infinite multiplicity of that banal landscape, listened to the long whisper of Reichbach's awakening, as in his childhood he had looked beyond the constellations at the smaller and smaller stars, until he could see no farther. And from the mere presence of

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the people passing there, hurrying in the morning sun, alike and different as leaves, there seemed to issue a secret that did not come only from the death that was still in ambush behind his back, a secret that was far less of death than of life—a secret that would not have been less poignant if man had been immortal.

"I have known that . . . feeling," said Walter. "And it seems to me sometimes that I will find it again, when I am old. . . . "

My father gazed at this man of seventy-five who said: when I am old. . . . Walter fixed his eyes on him, lifted his hand:

"They tell me that you recently dedicated one of your courses to my friend Friedrich Nietszche, when you were among those . . . Turks? I was in Turin—I happened to be in Turin . . . when I learned that he had just gone crazy there. I hadn't seen him: I had just arrived. Overbeck, who had been informed of it, tumbled, so to speak, from Basle to my lodgings: he had to take the poor man away immediately and hadn't even enough money for the tickets. As usual! You . . . know Nietzsche's face" (Walter indicated the portrait behind him); "but the photographs don't convey his expression: he had a feminine sweetness, in spite of his . . . ogre's moustache. That expression was gone."

His head was still motionless, his voice still withdrawn—as if he were speaking, not to my father but to the books and the illustrious photographs in the shadows, as if no listener would have been quite worthy of understanding him; or rather (my father's impression developed as he listened to him) as if the associates who would have understood what he was going to say were all of another epoch, as if no one, today, would take the trouble to understand, and he were talking only out of courtesy, lassitude and a sense of duty. There was in his whole attitude the same haughty modesty that was expressed by his little elevated desk.

"When Overbeck, in his distress, had cried 'Freidrich!' the poor man had embraced him, and immediately afterwards asked him in a distracted voice: 'Have you ever heard of Friedrich Nietzsche?' Overbeck reached out his hand clumsily. "I? no, I'm a stupid man. . . . "

Walter's hand, still raised, imitated Overbeck's. My father loved Nietzsche more than any other writer. Not for his preaching, but for the incomparable generosity of intelligence that he found in him. He listened, uneasy, fascinated.

"Then Friedrich had talked about the honors that were being

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planned for him. All right . . . we took him away. Luckily we had run into a friend of Overbeck's, a . . . dentist, who was used to handling cases of insanity. . . . I didn't have much money available, so we had to take third class tickets. What could we do! It was a long trip, in those days, from Turin to Basle. The train was almost filled up with poor people, Italian laborers. We knew from Friedrich's fellow-lodgers that he was subject to violent attacks. Finally, we found three seats. I stood in the corridor. Overbeck sat on Friedrich's left; Miescher, the dentist, on his right; next to them was a peasant woman. She looked like Overbeck, the same grandmotherly face. . . . In her basket there was a chicken that kept sticking its head out incessantly; the woman shoved it back in. It was enough to drive you into a fury,—I say: a fury! What must it have been for a . . . sick man! I was expecting some terrible incident.

"The train entered the Saint Gothard tunnel, which had just been finished. It took thirty-five minutes then to go through it—thirty-five minutes—and there was no light in the cars, at least in third class. The rocking in the dark, the smell of soot, the feeling that the trip would never end. . . . In spite of the clanking of the train, I could hear the chicken's beak pecking at the basket, and I was waiting. How could we deal with a crisis in that darkness?"

Except for his hardly moving lips, his whole face was still motionless in the theatrical light; but beneath his voice, punctuated by the drops falling from the tiles, there rumbled all the revenge that goes with certain kinds of compassion.

"And suddenly—you . . . are aware that a number of Friedrich's writings were still unpublished—a voice began to rise in the dark, above the clatter of the cars. Friedrich was singing—with perfect articulation, he who stammered in conversation—he was singing a poem we had never heard before; and it was his last poem, *Venice*.

"I do not like Friedrich's music. It is mediocre. But that song was . . . well, really: sublime.

"He had finished well before we left the tunnel. When we came out of the dark everything was the same as before. As before. . . . The same wretched carriage. The same peasant woman, the chicken, the laborers, the dentist. And we,—and he, besotted. The mystery you have been talking about, I never felt it so strongly. All that was so . . . fortuitous. . . . And Friedrich much more troubling than a corpse. It was life—I say simply: life. . . . A very . . . curious event had occurred: the song was as strong as life. I had just made a discovery. An important one. In the prison that Pascal speaks of,

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men have managed to draw from within themselves an answer that permeates, so to speak, with immortality those who are worthy of it. And in that railroad carriage. . . ."

For the first time he made a rather flowing gesture, not with his hand but with his fist, as though wiping off a blackboard.

"And in that railroad carriage, you see, and sometimes since—I say only: sometimes—the millennia of stars in the sky have seemed to me as much eclipsed by man, as our individual destinies are eclipsed by the stars in the sky. . . ."

He had stopped looking at my father, who was the more troubled by his sudden and apparently absent eloquence, because it took the same form as his own. Even as a child he had never seen Walter; and those ellipses, those abrupt and instinctive images had always been alien to Dietrich Berger. But already Walter had resumed the strange tone of disdain that seemed to be directed, beyond my father, to some invisible interlocutor:

"People passionately in love—I believe that is the expression?—oppose love to death. I never experienced it myself. But I know that certain works withstand the dizziness that comes from the contemplation of our dead, of the stars in the sky, of history. . . . There are a few of them here. No, not those gothic ones; you . . . know the head of the young man from the museum of the Acropolis? The first piece of sculpture to represent a human face, simply a human face; freed from monsters . . . from death . . . from the gods. That day, man was also drawn forth by man from clay. . . . That photograph, there, behind you. I have had the experience of studying it after looking a long time into a microscope. . . . The mystery of matter doesn't touch it."

The low, vast grating of the rain more and more delicate on the leaves, like the sound of burned paper disintegrating, came from outside; the big drop was still forming, and resounding as it fell into a puddle, regularly. Walter's voice became more withdrawn than ever:

"The greatest mystery is not that we should be thrown by chance between the profusion of matter and that of the stars; it is that in this prison we should extract from ourselves images strong enough to negate our nothingness. . . ."

Through some dormer-window, the mushroom-like smell of the trees dripping in the still tepid night came in along with the grating of the woodland silence, mingling with the dusty smell of bindings in the library sunk in darkness. In my father's mind,

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Nietzsche's song over the metallic din of the wheels, mixed with the image of the old man of Reichbach awaiting death behind the drawn curtains of his room, with the funeral repast, the caricature that corpses impose on those who approach them,—the metallic beat of the handles of the coffin being carried away on the men's shoulders. . . . The privilege that Walter was speaking of, how much more power it had against the stars in the sky than against pain! though even then it would perhaps have triumphed over a dead man's face, if the face were not a face that one loved. . . . For Walter, man was only the "pitiful little heap of secrets" made to nourish those works that as far as the far depths of the shadows surrounded his immobile face; for my father, all the stars in the sky were imprisoned in the feeling that caused a being already inhabited by the wish for death, at the end of a not brilliant and often painful life, to say: "If I could choose another life, I would choose my own. . . . "

Walter tapped his fingers nervously on the book on which his hands were resting. My father recalled the face where the only marks of suicide were a poignant serenity, the disappearance of wrinkles, the agonizing youth of death. . . . And he observed before him the almost similar face, with its strong planes of shadow, the glassy eyes motionless, and on the table, in the full light, Walter's trembling hands, the same as his own though larger, the woodcutter's hands of the Bergers of Reichbach, veins and hair grey.

(*Translated by Eleanor Clark*)

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Two Chapters from "The Myth of Sisyphus"

ALBERT CAMUS

SISYPHUS

THE GODS had condemned Sisyphus to roll a rock endlessly to the top of a mountain from which the rock falls back of its own weight. They thought with some reason that there was no punishment more awful than useless and hopeless labor.

If one is to believe Homer, Sisyphus was the most wise and prudent of mortals. However, there is another tradition according to which Sisyphus was a bandit. I see no contradiction here. Opinions differ on the reasons for his becoming a useless laborer in Hell. He is blamed, first, for some levity towards the gods. He betrayed their secrets. Egina, daughter of Asopus, was kidnapped by Jupiter. Her father was astonished by her disappearance and complained to Sisyphus. He, knowing of the kidnapping, offered to tell Asopus what had happened on the condition that he would give water to the citadel of Corinth. To the celestial lightning and thunderbolt he preferred the benediction of the water. He was punished for it in Hell. Homer tells us that Sisyphus had imprisoned Death. Pluto could not endure the spectacle of his empire deserted and silent. He appealed to the god of war who delivered Death from the hands of its victor.

It is also said that Sisyphus, being close to dying, imprudently wished to test the love of his wife. He ordered her to cast his body without burial in the midst of the public square. Sisyphus found himself in hell, and there, angered by an obedience so contrary to human love, he obtained permission from Pluto to return to earth in order to punish his wife. But when he again saw the face of this world, tasted the water and the sun, the warm rocks and the sea, he no longer wished to return to the shadow of hell. Recalls, outbursts of anger, warnings—had no effect upon him. For many years he lived in the bend of a bay before the breaking waves and amid the pleasures of this earth. The action of the gods was necessary. Mercury went to seize the audacious one by the collar, and, taking

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him from his happiness, removed him by force to hell and the rock prepared for him.

It is already obvious that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He is as much so through his passions as through his torment. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life earned for him the unspeakable punishment of his whole being being employed to achieve nothing. It is the price one must pay for the passions of this earth. We are told nothing about Sisyphus in hell. Myths are made in order that the imagination may give life to them. For this myth one need envisage only the entire effort of a body tensed to raise the enormous stone, to roll it and to make it climb a slope, an effort begun again a hundred times; one need only see the contracted face, the cheek pressed against the stone, the support of the shoulder which holds the clay-covered mass and the leg which wedges it, the resistance of the shoulders, the certainty wholly human of two hands full of earth. At the end of this long effort measured by a space without a sky and a time without depth, the goal is achieved. Sisyphus then gazes upon the stone falling back in a few seconds to the lower world from which he must bring it back to the summit. Again he descends to the plain.

It is during this return, this pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face which toils so near to stone is already stone itself. I see this man descend again with heavy but even step towards the torment the conclusion of which he will not know. This hour which is like a breath and which returns as surely as his misfortune, this is the hour of consciousness! At each of these moments, when he departs from the height and sinks little by little to the dens of the gods, he is superior to his destiny. He is stronger than his rock.

If this myth is tragic, it is because its hero is conscious. What, in fact, would be his suffering if at each step the hope of success sustained him? The worker of today labors every day of his life at the same tasks and his destiny is no less absurd. But he is tragic only at the rare moments when he becomes conscious. Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the entire extent of his clairvoyance which constitutes his torment contains at the same time his victory. There is no destiny which cannot be surmounted by scorn.

If the descent is made thus in sorrow on certain days, it can also be made in joy. The word, joy, is not excessive. I imagine once more how Sisyphus returned to his rock when his sorrow began. When the images of the earth have too strong a hold on the memory, when

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the attraction of happiness is too urgent, sadness arises in the heart of man: this is the victory of the rock, this is the rock itself. The immense distress is too heavy to bear. These are our nights of Gethsemane. But the crushing truths perish when they are recognized. Thus, Oedipus at first obeys his destiny without knowing it. From the moment that he knows it, his tragedy begins. But at the same instant, blind and desperate, he recognizes that the only link that connects him to the world is the cool hand of a young girl. A tremendous speech issued from his mouth: "In spite of so many experiences, my advanced age and the greatness of my soul make me judge that all is well." The Oedipus of Sophocles, like the Kirilov of Dostoevski, thus declares the formula of the absurd hero. Ancient wisdom unites with modern heroism.

One cannot discover the absurd without being tempted to write a manual about happiness. "What! by ways so narrow. . . . " But there is only one world. Happiness and absurdity are the two sons of the same earth. They are inseparable. It would be wrong to say that happiness was born necessarily from the discovery of the absurd. It is just as often true that the sentiment of the absurd gives birth to happiness. "I judge that all is well," says Oedipus, and his speech is holy. It resounds in the fierce and limited world of man. It teaches us that all is not, has not been exhausted. It drives from the world a god who had entered it along with dissatisfaction and the taste for useless sorrow. It makes destiny man's affair, an affair which must be managed among men.

Herein lies all the silent joy of Sisyphus. His destiny belongs to him. His rock is his thing. In the same way, the absurd man, in contemplating his torment, silences all the idols. In the universe suddenly restored to his silence, the thousand astonished small voices of the earth arise. Unconscious and secret appeals, the invitation of every face, these are the reverse side and the necessary price of victory. There is no sun without shadow, and it is necessary to know the night. The absurd man gives his assent, and his striving is without pause. If there is a personal destiny, there is no longer a destiny superior to it, or at least there is only one which he judges to be fatal and contemptible. For the rest, he knows himself to be the master of his days. At that subtle moment when man turns back upon his life, Sisyphus, returning to his rock, looks back briefly, and contemplates the succession of unconnected actions which have become his destiny, created by him, unified under the gaze of his memory, and soon broken off by his death. Thus, persuaded of the wholly human

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origin of all that is human, a blind being who desires to see and who knows that the night has no end, he is always on the march. The rock still rolls.

I leave Sisyphus at the bottom of the mountain. He will always regain his burden there. But Sisyphus teaches us that superior loyalty which denies the gods and lifts the rocks. He too judges that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each grain of the stone, each mineral gleam of that mountain overcast by night, to him alone, constitutes a world. The struggle itself toward the summit is sufficient to satisfy a man's heart. One must imagine that Sisyphus is happy.

(*Translated by Delmore Schwartz*)

HOPE AND THE ABSURD IN THE WORK OF FRANZ KAFKA

THE WHOLE of Kafka's art consists in compelling the reader to re-read him. His denouements, or their absence, suggest explanations, but explanations which are not clearly revealed and which require, in order to appear well founded, that the story be re-read from a new angle. Sometimes, there is a double possibility of interpretation—whence the necessity of two readings. This is what the author was seeking. But it would be wrong to want to interpret everything in detail in Kafka. A symbol is always in the realm of the general, and, however exact its translation, an artist can only restore movement to it: there is no word for word correspondence. Besides, nothing is more difficult to understand than a symbolic work. A symbol always goes beyond him who would use it and makes him say in fact more than he is conscious of expressing. In this respect, the surest means of laying hold of it is not to provoke it, to take up the work in no deliberate spirit, and not to look for its secret currents. For Kafka, in particular, it is fair to consent to his game, to approach the drama by its appearance and the novel by its form.

At first sight, and for a detached reader, these are disquieting adventures which carry off trembling and stubborn characters in pursuit of problems which they never formulate. In *The Trial* Joseph K . . . is accused. But he does not know of what. Doubtless, he is bent on defending himself, but he does not know why. The lawyers find his case difficult. Meanwhile, he does not neglect to make love, to eat and read his newspaper. Then he is judged. But the courtroom

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is very sombre. He understands very little of what is happening. He supposes only that he is condemned, but he scarcely asks himself to what he is condemned. Sometimes he doubts his condemnation as well, and continues to live. A long time afterward, two well-dressed and polite gentlemen seek him out and invite him to follow them. With the greatest courtesy, they lead him to a desperate-looking suburb, prop him up against a boulder, and thrust the knife into his heart. Before dying, the condemned man says only: "Like a dog."

Clearly then, it is difficult to speak of symbols in a work whose most perceptible quality is precisely its naturalness. But the natural is a difficult category to understand. There are works in which the events seem natural to the reader. But there are others (rarer, it is true) in which the character accepts what happens as natural. By a singular but evident paradox, the more extraordinary the adventures of the character the more perceptible will be the naturalness of the narrative: this is proportional to the separation that can be felt between the strangeness of a man's life and the simplicity with which he accepts it. This, it seems, is the naturalness of Kafka. Precisely thus, we perceive what *The Trial* means. People have spoken of an image of the condition of man. To be sure. But it is at once more simple and more complicated. I mean that the meaning of the novel is more particular and personal to Kafka. To a certain degree, it is he who speaks, if it is we whom he confesses. He lives and he is condemned. He learns this in the first pages of the novel which he is living in the world and if he tries to remedy this, he does so nevertheless without surprise. He will never be astonished enough at his own lack of astonishment. It is by these contradictions that one recognizes the first signs of the absurd work. The mind projects its spiritual tragedy into the concrete. And it can do this only by means of a perpetual paradox which gives to colors the powers of expressing the void and to our daily actions the power to translate eternal ambitions.

Likewise, *The Castle* is perhaps an actual theology, but it is above everything else the individual adventure of a soul in search of grace, of a man who asks of the objects of this world their kingly secret and of women the signs of the god slumbering in them. *Metamorphosis,* in its turn, certainly displays the horrible imagery of an ethics of lucidity. But it is also the product of that incalculable astonishment that man experiences in perceiving the creature he is capable of becoming without effort. It is in this fundamental ambiguity that the secret of Kafka resides. This perpetual counterbalancing of the

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natural with the extraordinary, the individual with the universal, the tragic with the banal, absurdity with logic, are found through all his work and give it at once its resonance and its meaning. These are the paradoxes that must be enumerated, the contradictions that must be intensified, in order to understand the absurd work.

A symbol, in fact, presupposes two levels, two worlds of ideas and sensations, and a dictionary of the correspondence between the one and the other. It is this lexicon that is the most difficult to establish. But to be aware of the two worlds in contact is already to be on the road to discovering their secret relations. In Kafka these two roads are those of daily life, on the one hand, and supernatural anxiety, on the other.[1] We seem to be present here at an inexhaustible elaboration of Nietzsche's saying: "The great problems are in the street."

There is in man's condition—it is the commonplace of all literatures—a fundamental absurdity as well as an implacable grandeur. The two coincide, as is natural. Both are represented, we repeat, in the ridiculous divorce which separates our spiritual intemperances from the perishable joys of the body. The absurdity is that the soul transcends its body so immeasurably. Whoever wishes to delineate this absurdity will have to give it life in this play of parallel contrasts. It is thus that Kafka expresses tragedy by the banal, and the absurd by logic.

An actor lends more force to a tragic character in proportion as he keeps himself from exaggerating. If he is restrained, the horror that he will excite will be enormous. In this respect Greek tragedy has much to teach us. In a tragic work, fate is always perceived better under the visage of logic and the natural. The fate of Oedipus is announced in advance. It is supernaturally decided that he will commit murder and incest. The whole effort of the drama is to show the logical system which, from deduction to deduction, proceeds to bring about the misfortune of the hero. The simple announcement of this unusual fate is scarcely horrible, because it lacks verisimilitude. But if the necessity is demonstrated to us in the framework of daily life, society, state, familiar emotion, then the horror is consecrated. In this revolt which shakes the man and makes him say: "That is

1. The works of Kafka can just as legitimately be interpreted in the sense of social criticism (for example, in *The Trial*). Probably, moreover, there is no forced choice: both interpretations are valid. In terms of the absurd, we have seen, the revolt against men is directed *also* to God: the great revolutions are always metaphysical.

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not possible," there is already the desperate certainty that "that" can be.

This is the whole secret of Greek tragedy, at least in one of its aspects. For there is another aspect which, by an inverse method, would permit us to understand Kafka better. The human heart has an unpleasant tendency to call fate only that which crushes it. But happiness also, in its fashion, is without reason, since it is inevitable. Modern man, however, attributes to himself the merit of it, when he does not disown it. There would be much to say, on the contrary, about the privileged destinies of Greek tragedy and the favorites of legend who, like Ulysses, in the midst of the worst adventures are rescued from themselves. It was not so easy to find the way back to Ithaca.

What must be remembered in every case is this secret complicity which, in tragedy, unites the logical to the banal. That is why Samsa, the hero of *Metamorphosis,* is a commercial traveller. That is why the only thing which disturbs him in the extraordinary adventure which reduces him to a bug is that his boss will be displeased by his absence. The legs and antennae of an insect grow from him, his spine arches, white spots appear on his belly, and—I will not say that it does not astonish him, the effect would be missed—but it causes in him a "faint vexation." The whole art of Kafka is in this nuance. In his central work, *The Castle*, the details of daily life are what appear in the foreground and yet in this strange novel where nothing is concluded and everything begins again, it is the essential adventure of a soul in quest of grace which is represented. This translation of the problem into action, this coincidence of the general and the particular—one recognizes them in the little artifices appropriate to every great creator. In *The Trial,* the hero could be named Schmidt or Franz Kafka. But his name is Joseph K. . . . It is not Kafka and yet it is he. It is a central European. He is like everybody. But he is also the entity K. who poses the X of this fleshly equation.

Also, if Kafka wishes to express the absurd, he makes use of coherence. There is the well-known story of the crazy man who was fishing in a bath-tub; a doctor who had his own ideas on psychiatric treatment asked him "If they were biting," and got the answer: "Of course not, fool, this is only a bathtub." This story is a bit baroque. But it makes very clear how the effect of absurdity is bound up with an excess of logic. Kafka's world is truly an unspeakable universe in which man allows himself the torturing luxury of fishing in a bathtub, knowing he will draw nothing out of it.

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Here then I recognize a work absurd in its principles. With regard to *The Trial,* for example, I can say that the success is total. The flesh triumphs. Nothing is lacking to this, neither the unexpressed revolt (it is that which writes), nor lucid and mute despair (it is that which creates), nor the astonishing liberty of gesture which the characters breathe up to their final death.

However, this world is not as closed as it appears to be. Into this universe without progress, Kafka is going to introduce hope in a peculiar form. In this respect, *The Trial* and *The Castle* do not move in the same direction. They complete one another. The imperceptible progression that can be disclosed from one to the other represents an enormous conquest in the order of escape. *The Trial* poses a problem which *The Castle,* to a certain extent, solves. The first describes, with a method almost scientific and without drawing a conclusion. The second, to a certain extent, explains. *The Trial* diagnoses and *The Castle* imagines a treatment. But the remedy proposed does not heal. It only makes the sickness re-enter normal life. It helps us accept it. In a certain sense (let us think of Kierkegaard), it makes us cherish the sickness. The surveyor K. cannot imagine another care than that which devours him. Those about him fall in love with this void and this suffering that has no name, as if suffering enclosed here a privileged fate. "How I need you," says Frieda to K. . . . "How abandoned I feel, since I have known you, when you are not beside me." This subtle remedy which makes us love what crushes us, and gives birth to hope in a world without issue, this brusque "leap" by which everything becomes changed—this is the secret of the existential revolution and of *The Castle* itself.

Few works are more rigorous, in their pace, than *The Castle.* K. is named surveyor of the castle and he arrives in the village. But from village to castle, it is impossible to communicate. For hundreds of pages K. will persist stubbornly at seeking his way, will try all steps, ruses, shifts, will never get tired, and with a disconcerting faith, will wish to recover the function that has been conferred upon him. Each chapter is a checkmate. And also a new beginning. This is not in the spirit of logic, but of mere continuation. The extent of this persistence constitutes the tragic aspect of the work. When K. telephones the castle, he hears confused and jumbled voices, vague laughs, far-off appeals. These suffice to nourish his hope, like the occasional signs that appear in the summer sky, or those promises of the evening which give us reason for living. Here we find the secret of melancholy

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peculiar to Kafka. The same, in fact, that one breathes in the work of Proust or in the landscape of Plotinus: the nostalgia for paradise lost. "I become very melancholy," says Olga, "when Barnabas tells me in the morning that he is going to the Castle; this journey which will be probably useless, this day probably lost, this hope probably vain." "Probably"—on this nuance Kafka stakes his entire work. But it is all of no use, here the search for the eternal is meticulous. And these inspired automata who are the characters of Kafka give us the very image of what we would be if deprived of our diversions[2] and surrendered completely to the humiliations of the divine.

In *The Castle* this submission to daily life becomes an ethics. The great hope of K. is to get the castle to adopt him. Being unable to reach this end alone, his whole effort is to merit this grace by becoming an inhabitant of the village, by losing this character of an alien which everybody makes him feel. What he wishes is a profession, a home, a normal and healthy human life. He is worn out with his madness. He wishes to be reasonable. He wishes to get rid of the peculiar curse which makes him a stranger in the village. In this regard, the episode with Frieda is significant. If he makes a mistress of this woman who knows one of the functionaries of the castle, it is because of his past. He draws from her something which transcends his past—at the same time he is aware of what makes her forever unworthy of the castle. One thinks here of Kierkegaard's singular love for Regina Olsen. With certain men, the fire of eternity which devours them is large enough to burn the heart even of those around them. The fatal error of giving to God what is not God's is also the subject of this episode of *The Castle*. But for Kafka, it seems that this is not an error. It is a doctrine and a "leap." There is nothing which is not God's.

More significant still is the fact that the surveyor detaches himself from Frieda in order to approach the sisters of Barnabas. For the family of Barnabas is the only one in the village which is completely abandoned by the castle and the village itself. Amalia, the eldest sister, has rejected the shameful proposition made her by one of the functionaries of the castle. The immoral curse which followed this has forever rejected her from the love of God. To be incapable of sacrificing one's honor for God is to become unworthy of His grace. Here

2. In *The Castle,* it seems clear that the "diversions," in the sense of Pascal, are represented by the assistants, who "turn" K. from his care. If Frieda ends by becoming the mistress of one of these assistants, it is because she prefers appearance to reality, everyday life to the sharing of dread.

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is a theme familiar in existential philosophy: truth contrary to morality. Here, matters go further. For the road taken by Kafka's hero, from Frieda to the sisters of Barnabas, is the very road which leads from trusting love to the deification of the absurd. Here again, Kafka's thought rejoins Kierkegaard. It is not surprising that the "narrative of Barnabas" is placed at the end of the book. The final attempt of the surveyor is to find God through what denies Him, to recognize Him, not according to the categories of goodness and beauty, but behind the empty and hideous faces of His indifference, His injustice and His hatred.

The stranger who asks the castle to adopt him is, at the end of his voyage, a little more exiled since, this time, it is to himself that he is unfaithful and because he abandons morality, logic, and the truths of the mind, in order that he may try to enter, rich only in his mad hope, the desert of divine grace.

The word hope is not ridiculous here. On the contrary, the more tragic the condition narrated by Kafka, the more austere and provoking becomes this hope. The more *The Trial* is truly absurd, the more the exalted "leap" of *The Castle* appears moving and illicit. We find here in its pure state the paradox of existential thought as Kierkegaard, for example, expresses it: "One must strike dead earthly hope, it is only then that one is saved by true hope"; which can be translated: "One must have written *The Trial* to understand *The Castle*."

Most of those who have spoken of Kafka have, in fact, defined his work as a despairing cry in which no recourse is left to man. But this needs to be revised. There is hope and hope. The optimistic work of M. Henri Bordeaux seems to me singularly discouraging, because it permits nothing to hearts which are a little difficult. The thought of Malraux, on the contrary, always remains a tonic. But in the two cases, it is not a question of the same hope and the same despair. I see only that the absurd work itself can lead to the unfaithfulness which I wish to avoid. The work which was only a narrow repetition of a sterile condition, a clairvoyant exaltation of the perishable, becomes here a cradle of illusions. It explains, it gives a form to hope. The creator can no longer separate himself from it. It is not the tragic game that it ought to be. It gives a meaning to the life of the author.

It is singular, in any case, that works of an inspiration so kindred as those of Kafka, Kierkegaard, or Shestov, those, in short, of existen-

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tial novelists and philosophers, turned completely towards the Absurd and its consequences, come out at the end with this immense cry of hope.

They embrace the God who devours them. It is through humility that hope is introduced. For the absurdity of this existence assures them a little more of supernatural reality. If the path of this life ends with God, there is, then, a way out. And the perseverance, the stubbornness with which Kierkegaard, Shestov, and the heroes of Kafka repeat their journeys are a singular guarantee of the exalting power of this certainty.[3]

Kafka denies his god moral grandeur, evidence, goodness, coherence, but only in order to throw himself more completely into his arms. The Absurd is recognized, accepted, man resigns himself to it and from that moment we know that he is no longer absurd. Within the limits of man's condition, what greater hope than that which permits one to escape this condition? I see it once again: existential thought in this respect, and contrary to the common opinion, is shaped by an enormous hope—the very same which, with primitive Christianity and the annunciation of good tidings, raised the ancient world. But in this leap which characterizes all existential thought, in this stubborn-ness, in this surveying of a divinity without surface—how can one fail to see the mark of a lucidity being given up. One wishes only that it be pride which abdicates in order to be saved. This renunciation would be fruitful. But this fruitfulness would not change that other. The moral value of lucidity is not diminished in my eyes by pronouncing it as sterile as all pride. For a truth, too, by its very definition, is sterile. Everything evident is sterile. In a world where everything is given and nothing is explained, the fruitfulness of a value or of a metaphysic is a notion empty of meaning.

In any case, it is clear here under what tradition of thought the work of Kafka is inscribed. It would be intelligent, in fact, to consider the progress from *The Trial* to *The Castle* a rigorous one. Joseph K. and the surveyor K. are only the two poles which attract Kafka.[4]

I shall speak like him and say that his work is probably not absurd. But that does not prevent us from seeing its grandeur and its universality. These qualities derive from his ability to represent with

3. The only character without hope in *The Castle* is Amalia. It is to her that the surveyor is most violently opposed.

4. On the two aspects of Kafka's thought, compare *The Penal Colony*: "The guilt (i.e., of man) is never in doubt"; and a fragment of *The Castle*: "The guilt of the surveyor K. . . is difficult to establish."

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so much abundance the daily passage from hope to distress and from desperate wisdom to voluntary blindness. His work is universal (a truly absurd work is not universal), in proportion as it represents the touching face of man fleeing humanity, extracting from his contradictions reasons to believe, reasons to hope from his fecund despair, and giving the name of life to his terrifying apprenticeship to death. It is universal because its inspiration is religious. As in all religions, man is delivered here from the weight of his own life. But if I know that, if I can also admire it, I also know that I am not seeking what is universal but what is true. It is possible that the two do not coincide.

This point of view will be better understood if I say that really disheartening thought is defined by opposite criteria, and that the tragic work could be that which, with all future hope exiled, describes the life of a happy man. The more exalting life is, the more absurd is the idea of losing it. Here, perhaps, is the secret of that superb aridity that one breathes in the work of Nietzsche. Within this order of ideas, Nietzsche appears to be the only artist who has drawn the extreme consequences of an aesthetic of the Absurd, since his final message resides in a sterile and conquering lucidity, in an obstinate negation of every supernatural consolation.

The preceding will have sufficed, however, to reveal the capital importance of Kafka's work within the framework of this essay. We are transported here to the confines of human thought. Giving to the word its full meaning, we can say that everything in this work is essential. In any case, it proposes the problem of the absurd in its entirety. If we wish to connect these conclusions with our initial remarks, the basis of the form, the secret meaning of *The Castle,* of the natural art with which it develops, the passionate and proud search of K., the appearance of daily life in which it unfolds—we shall understand what its greatness can be. For if nostalgia is the mark of the human, no one, perhaps, has given so much flesh and relief to these phantasms of regret. But we shall grasp at the same time what is the singular greatness required by the absurd work, which is perhaps not found here. If the characteristic of art is to attach the general to the particular, the perishable eternity of a drop of water to the play of its lights, it is truer still to appreciate the greatness of the absurd writer by the separation which he is able to introduce between these two worlds. His secret is to know how to find the exact point where they meet, in their greatest disproportion.

And to tell the truth, the pure in heart can see everywhere this geometrical point of intersection between man and the inhuman. If

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Faust and Don Quixote are outstanding creations of art, it is because of the unmeasured greatness they show us with their earthly hands. A moment always comes, however, when the mind denies the truths that its hands can touch. A moment comes when the creation is no longer taken as tragic: it is taken only as serious. Man then busies himself with hope. But this is not his business. His business is to turn away from subterfuge. Now, it is this which I find at the end of the vehement trial which Kafka brings against the whole universe. His incredible verdict is this hideous and overwhelming world in which the mice themselves get entangled in hope.[5]

(*Translated by William Barrett*)

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5. What is proposed in the foregoing is obviously an interpretation of Kafka's work. It is just to add that nothing prevents our considering it, apart from every interpretation, from the purely aesthetic angle. For example, B. Groethuysen in his remarkable preface to *The Trial* limits himself, with more wisdom than we, to following in it only the sorrowful imaginations of what he calls, in a striking phrase, a wakened sleeper. It is the fate, and perhaps the greatness, of this work to offer us everything and to confirm nothing.

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The Temptation of (Saint) Flaubert

PAUL VALERY

I ADMIT to having a weakness for *The Temptation of Saint Anthony.*

But why not say right at the start that neither *Salammbô* nor *Bovary* has ever carried me away, the first with its erudite, savage and sumptuous imagery, the second with its "truth," that is to say, its painstaking reconstruction of mediocrity?

Flaubert, like his whole epoch, believed in the value of "historical evidence" and in the bald observation of present fact. But these are worthless idols. The only reality in art is art itself.

The best of men, and the most serious of artists, but without too much grace or profundity of mind, Flaubert was unable to resist the very simple formula proposed by Realism, and took for granted the naive authority which rests on immense learning and what is called "criticism of texts."

The Realism fashionable in 1850 failed to distinguish clearly between the precise observation of scientists and the crude, unselective asseverance of things that occurs in ordinary vision; it confused these two, and its policy was to oppose them both, as if they were identical, to the passion for embellishment and exaggeration which it noted and condemned in Romanticism. But "scientific" observation requires definite operations able to transform phenomena into intellectually usable products: one must convert things into numbers and numbers into laws. Literature, on the other hand, which aims at immediate and instantaneous effects, needs an entirely different kind of "truth", a truth for everyone, which cannot, therefore, separate itself from the vision of everyone and from what ordinary speech can express. But ordinary speech is on everyone's tongue and the common vision of things is valueless, like the air we all breathe, while the essential ambition of the writer is necessarily to differentiate himself. This opposition between the basic dogma of Realism—concern for the banal—and the will to exist on an exceptional plane and as a personality, in some way precious, resulted in turning the attention of

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the Realists to the search for, and cult of, style. They created the "artistic" style. In describing the most ordinary, and often the meanest, objects, they brought to bear a refinement, a concentration, a labor and integrity which are in a way admirable; but without perceiving that all they undertook, in this respect, was unrelated to their principal aim and that they were inventing a singular type of "truthfulness," a wholly fantastic truth of their own fabrication. The fact is that they situated their commonplace characters, incapable of responding to the colors, or of delighting in the forms of things, in milieus, the description of which necessitated a painter's eye and a distinctive sensibility alert to everything which escapes the ordinary man. These peasants and *petits-bourgeois* of the Realists lived and moved in a world which they could no more see than an illiterate can read. When they spoke, their stupidities and platitudinous talk were made parts of a calculated and unusual linguistic system, rhythmic, weighed word by word, and which expressed respect for the self and the desire to be remarked. Realism ended, curiously enough, by giving an impression of the most deliberate artifice.

One of Realism's most disconcerting applications is the one to which I referred before and which consists in taking as realities the data presented to us in the form of "historical documents," relating to some more or less distant epoch, and of attempting to construct, on this foundation of verbal matter, a work which is to give a sensation of the "truth" of the epoch in question. Nothing is more painful to me than to contemplate the amount of work expended in building a tale on the illusory foundation of an erudition even more vain than any fantasy. For pure fantasy springs from what is as authentic as anything in this world, the desire to be delighted, and finds its path in the hidden dispositions of the various feelings which constitute us. One invents only what invents itself and wants to be invented. But the forced products of erudition are necessarily impure, since the chance by which texts are or are not available, the conjecture which interprets them, the translation which betrays them, mix with the intention, interests and passions of the scholar, not to speak of those of the chronicler, scribe, evangelist or copyist. This kind of production is the paradise of middle-men.

This is what weighs on *Salammbô* and weighs on me in reading it. I get much more pleasure out of reading tales of a fabulous antiquity, wholly free from fact, like *La Princesse de Babylone,* or *l'Akédysseril* of Villiers, books which do not make one think of other books.

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(What I have said about the true in Literature applies also to those works which pretend to "truthfulness" in the observation of inner life. Stendhal flattered himself that he knew the human heart, that is to say, that he invented nothing in speaking of it. But what interests us in what he has to say about the human heart comes from Stendhal himself. As to his desire to make his notions part of an organic knowledge of man in general, this intention would either presuppose a very modest claim with respect to such knowledge, or a confusion like that of mistaking the actual enjoyment of a delicious dish, product of an exquisite cuisine, for the definite acquisition attained by an exact and impersonal chemical analysis.)

It is not impossible that some suspicion of the difficulties raised by the will to realism in art, and of the contradictions consequent on its becoming categorical, made Flaubert partial to the idea of writing a *Tempation of Saint Anthony.* This "Temptation"—a temptation throughout his life—was to him a kind of intimate antidote for the boredom he felt (as he admits) in writing his novels of modern *mores* and in constructing stylistic monuments to the platitude of provincial and bourgeois life.

And something else may have served him as a goad. I am not thinking of the picture of Breughel he saw at the Balbi palace in Genoa in 1845. This naive and complicated painting, composed of monstrous details—horned demons, hideous beasts, women much too tender, a work of an imagination always superficial and often amusing—may have awakened in him a desire for deviltries: for descriptions of impossible beings, incarnate sins, all the morbid developments of fear, desire, remorse; but the actual impulse to conceive and begin the work seems to me due, rather, to his reading of Goethe's *Faust. Faust* and the *Temptation* are inspired by similar origins and the analogies between the themes of both are evident: folk creations, with popular careers at fairs, the two legends could be inscribed under the one exergue: Man and the Devil. In the *Temptation* the devil attacks the faith of the solitary man whose nights he crowds with heart-breaking visions, contradictory doctrines and beliefs, corrupting and luxurious promises. But Faust has already read everything, known everything, already burned all that could be worshipped. He has exhausted by his own efforts what the devil proposes or demonstrates to Anthony by means of images, and from the very first it is only the most juvenile kind of love which can seduce him (this I find

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fairly surprising). He comes at last to accept as a desperate justification for his desire to live a kind of aesthetic passion, a supreme thirst for the beautiful, the vanity of political power and the conjuring tricks of high finance having been revealed to him throughout his mephistophelian adventure. Faust looks for something which might tempt him; Anthony longs not to be tempted.

It seems to me that Flaubert did little more than catch a glimpse of the themes, possibilities and points of departure for a truly superior work offered by the story of the *Temptation*. His very insistence on exactitude and pedantic correctness show to what degree he lacked the decision of mind and ordering will necessary for the construction of a high-powered literary machine.

His over-concern to astonish with many episodes, apparitions, and an abruptly changing scene, with various theses and voices, engenders in his reader a growing sensation of being caught in a library suddenly on the rampage, a library all of whose volumes are vociferating their millions of words in unison and all of whose mutinous shelves are pouring out their etchings and drawings. "He read too much," one says of the author, as one says of a man that he drank too much.

But Goethe, in *Eckermann*, speaking of the *Walpurgis Nacht*, says this:

"An infinite number of mythological figures demand to be included in it; but I am on my guard. And I accept only those that hold before me the images I seek."

This wisdom is not to be found in the *Temptation*. Flaubert was always haunted by the demon of encyclopedic knowledge; he tried to exorcise this demon by writing *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. Intent on surrounding Anthony with marvels, he was not satisfied merely to leaf through the big, secondary reference books, the thick dictionaries of Bayle, Moreri, Trévoux and their colleagues; he explored the most original texts available. He became positively drunk on references and notes. But all the work he gave to the torrent of figures and formulas which desolate the night of the anchorite, all the wit he expended on the innumerable entries in this devilish ballet, the themes of gods and deities, of heresiarchs and allegorical monsters, he withdrew from and refused to the hero himself, who remains a

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poor and pitiful victim in the center of an infernal whirlwind of apparitions and errors.

Anthony, it must be acknowledged, scarcely exists.

His reactions are disconcertingly weak. We are surprised that he is not more charmed, more dazzled, more irritated or shocked by what he sees and hears; we see him at a loss for invective and raillery and even not apt with violently ejaculated prayers when he confronts the foul masquerade and the flux of revolting, blasphemous and beautiful phrases which haunt him. He is fatally passive; he neither yields nor resists; he awaits the end of the nightmare, throughout which he will have found occasion to do little more than give vent to mediocre exclamations from time to time. His replies are dodges and we, like the Queen of Sheba, have a violent desire to pinch him.

(But maybe in this respect Anthony is more "true to life," that is to say, more like most men? Do we not live a really frightening dream, wholly absurd, and what do we do about it?)

It would seem that Flaubert was carried away by what was accessory and lost sight of what was essential. He was too attentive to the engaging effects of scenery, contrasts, "pleasing" precisions of detail, picked here and there in books seldom or carelessly read: hence, like Anthony himself (but a fallen Anthony), Flaubert lost his soul—I mean the soul of his theme, which was dedicated to become a masterpiece. He missed one of the most beautiful dramas conceivable, a work of first rank which only asked to be created. In not concerning himself at every point with the problem of giving his hero power and life, he neglected the very essence of his theme: he did not hear the call from the depths. Now what exactly was involved? Nothing less than the task of bodying forth what might be called the physiology of temptation, the entirety of that essential mechanism in which colors, savors, the hot and the cold, silence and sound, the true and the false, good and evil appear as material forces and establish themselves in us as ever impending antagonisms. It is clear that any "temptation" is the result of seeing or imagining something which gives the character of a definite sensation to our lack of that thing. Thus is created a need which either did not exist or slept, and straightway we are modified in some respect, importuned in some part of our being, and the rest of our being is swept along in the train of the over-excited part. In Breughel the neck of the

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gourmand stretches out towards the pie he stares at, which his nostrils sniff, and we feel that the whole mass of his body is going to join his head, which will have joined the object before him. In nature the root of the tree pushes towards wet ground, the summit towards the sun, and the plant thrives by changing unbalance into unbalance, greed into greed. The amoeba deforms itself in approaching its tiny prey, obeys that which it is going to convert into its own substance, then hauls itself to its adventuring pseudopodium and reassembles itself. This type of mechanism is characteristic of all organic life; the devil, alas! is nature itself, and temptation is the most obvious, the most constant, the most inescapable condition of life. To live means to lack something at every moment—to modify oneself in order to attain it—and hence to aim at returning again to the state of lacking something. We live on the unstable, by means of the unstable, within the unstable: it is all the work of the Sensibility, which is the diabolical life-trick of organized beings. What could be more extraordinary to try to conceive and what, shown in operation, could be more "poetical" than that irreducible power which is everything for each of us, which coincides with us, moves us, speaks to us and within us, disposes of pleasure, grief, need, disgust, hope, power or weakness, creates values, makes us angels or beasts in accordance with the day or the hour? I am thinking of the variety, the intensity, the versatility of our feeling substance, of its infinite potentialities, its countless relays, by whose play it divides itself against itself, fools itself, multiplies its forms of desire or of refusal, arrives at intelligence, language, symbols, which it develops and combines so as to construct strange, abstract worlds. I have no doubt that Flaubert was aware of the profundity of his theme; but one might say that he was afraid to plunge into it to the depth where whatever can be learned from books no longer counts. . . . And so he went astray in too many books and myths; he lost the strategic conception, I mean the unity of his composition, which could reside only in an Anthony, one part of whom was Satan. . . . The work remains a mixture of moments and fragments; but among these are some that are written for all time. Such as it is, I regard it with reverence, and I never open it without finding reasons for admiring the author more than it.

(*Translated by Lionel Abel*)

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Poems

ROSS BARRIER

You must rise early to see the day dawn on the iceberg's horizon, at the hour when the sun of Southern latitudes spreads in the distance its paths upon the sea. Miss Jane carried her parasol, and I an elegant double-barrelled shotgun. In each narrow pass in the glacier, we kissed each other in the mint-green crevasses, and carefully postponed the moment of seeing the red hot ball of sun open for itself a path through spangled whipped cream and ice. We preferred to walk along the seashore where the cliff breathed regularly with the tide, and the sea's slow rolling, like a pachyderm, put us in the mood for love. The waves beat against the walls of ice, of green and blue snow, and cast at our feet, in the coves, giant crystal flowers, but the coming of the day was particularly sensed by the light phosphorous hem which ran along the festoons of the crest as when the nocturnal capitals begin to float on the sweep of their high sea. At the Cape of Devastation, in the ice gaps, there grew night-blue edelweiss, and we were always sure of seeing renewed day by day a fresh stock of sea-birds' eggs, which Jane believed to have the virtue of bleaching the skin. It became a rite with me to renew each day, and then pluck with my lips, this childish adage on Jane's mouth. Sometimes the clouds, hiding the foot of the cliff from us, presaged a cloudy afternoon, and Jane inquired in a tiny voice whether or not I had carefully wrapped the Cheshire cheese sandwiches. At last the bank became higher and all chalky in the sun, it was Desolation Point, and at a signal from Jane, I spread out the cover on the fresh snow. We stayed there, stretched out, a long time, listening to the heart-beats of the wild sea horses in the ice caverns. The far horizon was a semi-circle of diamond frosted blue which the ice-sea upheld, where sometimes a wisp of vapour was born, detached from the sea like a white veil, and Jane quoted me verses from Lermontov. I could have spent whole afternoons there, my hand in hers, listening to the screech of the sea-birds, throwing pieces of ice and listening as they fell into the abyss, and Jane counted off the seconds, her tongue stuck out slightly

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like a thoughtful school girl's. Then we embraced so long and so tightly that the melted snow hollowed out a furrow more narrow than an infant's cradle, and when we got up again, the blanket between the two white breasts reminded us of those mules in Asia which climb down the snow-saddled mountains.

Then the blue of the sea grew darker and the cliff turned violet; it was the hour when the sudden evening cold tore from the iceberg those crystal cities which crumble in an ice dust with a noise like the explosion of a world, and expose under the Cyclopean volutes of a blue wave a ship's belly chapped with dark seaweed, or the heavy snorting of a plesiosaurus' bath. This cannonade of a world's end was fired nearer and nearer to the edge of the horizon, like a Waterloo of the solitudes, for us alone. Much later, the night, fallen very cold, was pricked in the great silence by the distant gushing of the tall phantom white-plumed geysers, but I already held Jane's frozen hand in mine, and we came back under the light of the pure Antarctic stars.

JULIEN GRACQ

(*Translated by Gerrie Thielens*)

EXPLANATION OF METAPHORS

Far from time and space a man's gone astray,
Slender as a hair, ample as the dawn,
His nostrils foaming, his two eyes revulsed,
His hands stretched forward to touch the decor

(Non-existent). But someone's sure to ask,
What is the meaning of this metaphor:
"Slender as a hair, ample as the dawn"
These nostrils eluding three dimensions?

If I speak of time, then it is not yet,
If I speak of a place, it has vanished,
If I speak of a man, he'll soon be dead,
If I speak of time, it no longer is,

If I speak of space, a god destroys it,
Or of years, it is to annihilate,
If I hear silence a god comes screaming
And his bellows can only do me harm.

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For these gods are demons; they trail in space
Slender as a hair, ample as the dawn,
Nostrils foaming, spittle on their faces,
Their hands stretched forward to seize a decor

(Non-existent). But someone's sure to ask,
What is the meaning of this metaphor:
"Slender as a hair, ample as the dawn"
Why this face eluding three dimensions?

I speak of gods, since they cover the sea
With infinite weight, with immortal flight,
I speak of gods since they frequent the winds,
I speak of gods, since they're perpetual,

I speak of gods, since they live underground,
In the soil drawing their vivacious breath,
I speak of gods, since they hatch the iron,
Amass the coal, distill the cinnabar.

Are they gods or demons? They fill up time,
Slender as a hair, ample as the dawn,
Nostrils foaming, their eye-enamel cracked,
Their hands stretched forward to seize a decor

(Non-existent). But someone's sure to ask,
What is the meaning of this metaphor:
"Slender as a hair, ample as the dawn"
These two hands eluding three dimensions?

They're demons. One descends, the other mounts.
To each night its day, each peak its valley,
To each day its night, each tree its shadow,
Each being its Not, each good its evil,

These reflections, negative images,
Behave like immobility, throwing
Their active multitude into the void,
Composing a double to every truth.

But neither god nor demon, man has strayed,
Slender as a hair, ample as the dawn,
His nostrils foaming, his two eyes revulsed,
His hands stretched forward to touch a decor

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(Non-existent). That's because he has strayed;
Not slender enough nor ample enough:
Too many wrenched muscles, too much spittle.
He'll find calm when he sees the Temple of
His form assure his own eternity.

RAYMOND QUENEAU

DA - SEIN

The boat rides in the cove like a face
It is there it shines with valor like sweet fire
Around it evening shuts off the distances
with formidable laughter of mountains

It's at high heat behind the bulwarks
glossy and trembling against waves and moon
mahogany turned inward to where dreams are
abrasive laughs—they'll not wear it away

Inexorable wall black boulders
clouds have piled up all the breasts of the night
the tranquil wind in avalanches of rocks
It is there . . .

At home Nature never stops she's drunk
Applauds herself hurling on her wheel the giantess Nature
I'm not mistaken . . . this little boat
without fear into the night its anguished smile.

HATEFULLY MY LOVE POETRY

Like a snake that reascends streams
like a sword that dies and is born again in silence
like a great woman that simmers
like a couple of beans rolling on the scraped earth
like the fiery nimbleness of a salamander on a sinking wall
mere fire she crosses the pale void glittering
like time worn away by the night
obscure as a glow-worm
many-branched as a star long extinguished
which suddenly lights up again
hatefully my love poetry.

ANDRE FRENAUD

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LEGEND

Go say to my beloved Island, down there,
Beside the sombre Foulc marsh, in the heath,
That I'll come to her this evening, to wait,
That when the moon rises she'll hear my step.

You'll find her with her feet under the hulls,
Her hair fallen down and her eyes half-closed,
Naive, holding one hand over her mouth
So as not to waken the sleeping birds.

The marshes are all imbued with legend,
Like the sky you discover in her eyes,
When they drink the good moon over the heath
Or the sad winds come down from high places.

Tell her I've spent marvelous dawns lying
In wait for birds coming back from the north,
So close to her, shivering and stretched out
At my feet, a little sleeping savage.

Tell her it's near the end of September
Here, that winters are hard in these lost lands,
That through the open window of my room
Medleys of flowers are always in bloom.

Announce me as a prophet, as a prince,
As a king's son from beyond the sea, say
That perfumes inundate my provinces,
And that the Highlands suffer no winter.

Tell her balconies here will be in bloom,
That she will bathe in ponds without fever,
But I'd wish to see in her darkened eyes
The savage secret that dies on the lips,

The enigma of a purely transparent
Look, that sometimes flashes with the lightning
Of great initiates in games of the mind,
And large sea-birds under deserted skies.

PATRICE DE LA TOUR DU PIN

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LOUIS CUREL DE LA SORGUE

Sorgue, you who advance behind a shimmering curtain of butterflies, with your sickle of a loyal dean in your hand, the pot-hook of torment like a collar at your neck, to finish your man's day, when shall I wake up and be happy to the modeled rhythm of your irreproachable rye? Blood and sweat have taken up their battle which will go on until evening, until your return, solitude of wider and wider margins. The weapon of your masters, the time-piece of the tides, finally decomposes. Creation and laughter are dissociated. The air-king announces himself. Sorgue, your shoulders like an open book propagate their text. Child, you have been the bridegroom of that wayside flower traced in the rock and which escaped by a wasp. Today, bent over, you observe the agony of the persecutor who tore from the lover of earth the cruelty of numberless ants in order to throw it in millions of murderers against yours and your hope. Crush again the cancerous egg that resists. . . .

There's a man standing upright now, a man in a field of rye, a field like a machine-gunned choir, a saved field.

RENE CHAR

AGE OF HEARTS

Lovely age of vacations
Age of open casements
of pores illumined by the bath
Age of hearts with no ballast
but the wet sand
carved by each beat of the tide
into a fortress

Lovely age of sand
illumined each moment by the tide
refreshed by the bath
Age of open hearts
neither etched nor moistened
by any acid of remorse

Age of sand strewn in profusion
by the crenellations of the fortress

Age of hearts
which the sea carves grain by grain

MICHEL LEIRIS

(The poems by Queneau, Frenaud, du Pin, Char and Leiris are translated by Barbara Gibbs).

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AND MORE CHANGES STILL

By force of suffering I lost the limits of my body and irresistably gave up my form.

I was all things: ants especially, interminably in file, laborious and yet hesitating. It was a terrific moving about. I had to give it all my attention. I soon noticed that I was not only the ants, but also their path. And after being crumbly and dusty at first, it became hard and my suffering was horrible. I expected that at any moment it would explode and be hurled into space. But it held firm.

I rested as well as I could on another part of me, a softer one. This was a forest and the wind stirred it gently. But there came a tempest, and the roots, to resist the increasing wind, bored into me,—a mere trifle,—but went on to hook so deeply into me that it was worse than death. A sudden fall of earth made a beach enter into me, a pebbly beach. Then it began to ruminate inside me and that summoned the sea, the sea.

Often I turned boa and, although a little troubled by the elongation, I would prepare to sleep or else I was a bison and would prepare to graze, but soon from one shoulder came a typhoon, boats were thrown into the air, the steamers wondered whether they would reach port, only SOS's could be heard.

I regretted not being a boa or bison any more. A little later and I had to shrink up so as to fit into a saucer. Always the changes were abrupt, everything had to be made over, and that was not worth the trouble, it would last only a few instants and yet you had to adapt yourself, and always these abrupt changes. It is not so very troublesome to pass from a rhombohedron to a truncated pyramid, but it is very troublesome to pass from a truncated pyramid to a whale; you must know immediately how to dive, to breathe, and then the water is cold, and then you find yourself face to face with the harpooners, but I, as soon as I saw a man, fled. But it happened that I was suddenly transferred into a harpooner, then I had just as long again a distance to go over. At last I succeeded in overtaking the whale, I quickly launched a harpoon from the bow, well-sharpened and solid (after having first made fast and checked the rope); the harpoon darted, penetrated far into the flesh, making an enormous wound. I realized then that I was the whale, I had changed into it again, there was a new opportunity to suffer, and I am not one who can get used to suffering.

After a mad race I lost my life, then I was turned into a boat;

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and when I am the boat, you can well believe how I take in water all over, and when things get desperate, be sure I become captain, I try to display an attitude of sangfroid, but I am without hope, and if in spite of everything we are saved, then I am changed into a rope and the rope breaks and if a life boat is smashed right at that moment I am all its planks, I sink and become an echinoderm that lasts no more than a second, for, disabled in the midst of enemies of whom I know nothing, they catch me at once, are devouring me alive with those white and ferocious eyes that are found only under water, under the salt sea water which makes all my wounds smart. Oh! who will leave me be for a bit? But no, if I do not budge, I rot where I am, and if I budge it is to undergo the blows of my enemies. I don't dare make a move. Just then I throw myself out of joint to become part of a grotesque mass with a defect of equilibrium which is revealed only too soon and too clearly.

If I always changed into animal form, and there were no help for it, I should at last have accustomed myself, since it is always more or less the same behavior, the same principle of action and reaction, but I turn into things too (and even things would be bearable), but I am such artificial and impalpable combinations. What a to-do when I was changed into lightning! There you must be quick, I who always drag and never know how to come to a decision.

Ah! if I could only die once and for all. But no, I am always found good for some new being and yet I only pull boners and lead it promptly to its destruction. No matter, I am immediately given a new one where my prodigious incapacity can prove itself anew.

And again and again, without respite. There are so many animals, so many plants, so many minerals. And I have already been everything so many times. But these experiments do not help me. Becoming ammonium hydrochlorate again for the thirty-second time, I still have a tendency to behave like arsenic, and, changed once more into a dog, my night-bird habits always show up.

Only rarely do I see something without experiencing this very special feeling . . . ah yes, I have been THAT . . . I don't remember exactly. I feel it. That is why I am particularly fond of Illustrated Encyclopedias. I turn over the leaves, I turn over the leaves and I often find some satisfaction, for there are some pictures of several creatures that I have not yet been. That rests me, that is delightful, I say to myself: "I might have been this too and this and that has been spared me." I heave a sigh of relief. Ah! a rest at last!

HENRI MICHAUX

(*Translated by Richard Ellman*)

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The Provincial Portrait Gallery*

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

I PASSED quickly through the dimly lighted vestibule. My steps made no sound on the black and white flagstones. Around me a whole race of people twisted their plaster arms. I caught a glimpse in passing, through two large openings, of cracked vessels, plates, a blue and yellow satyr on a pedestal. It was the Bernard Palissy room, consecrated to ceramics and the minor arts. But I don't get much fun from ceramics. A lady and gentleman in mourning were respectfully contemplating these baked objects.

Over the entrance of the main salon—or the Bordurin-Renaudas Salon—was hung, doubtless recently, a large canvas which I did not know. It was signed Richard Séverand and was called *The Death of the Bachelor*. It was a gift of the state.

Nude to the waist, the torso a little green as befits the dead, the bachelor lay on an unmade bed. The disordered sheets and blankets attested to a long period of suffering. I smiled, thinking of M. Fasquelle. *He* was not alone: his daughter was looking after him. Already, on the canvas, the maid, a clever servant with features marked by vice, had opened the drawer of a bureau and was counting some money. Through an open door could be seen waiting in the shadows a man with a cap, a cigaret hanging from his lower lip. Near the wall a cat lapped some milk indifferently.

This man had lived only for himself. As a punishment, severe and deserved, no one had come to his deathbed to close his eyes. This picture gave me a final warning: there was still time, I could retrace my steps. But, if I went further, I knew very well that on the walls of the great room which I was about to enter more than one hundred and fifty portraits were hung; if one excepted some young people wrested too soon from their families, and the Mother Superior of an orphanage, not one of those represented had died unmarried, not one had died without children or intestate, not one without the last sacraments. Their accounts in order, on that day

* This is a chapter from the novel *La Nausée*.

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as on other days, with God and with the world, these men had slipped gently into death, to claim that part of eternal life to which they had the right.

For they had the right to everything: to life, to work, to riches, to command, to respect, and, in the end, to immortality.

I reflected for a moment and entered. A guard slept near a window. The pale light which came from the windows spotted the pictures. Nothing alive in that great rectangular room but a cat who took fright at my entrance and fled. But I felt the gaze of a hundred and fifty pairs of eyes upon me.

All who belonged to the elite of Bouville between 1875 and 1910 were there, men and women, scrupulously painted by Renaudas and Bordurin.

The men built Sainte-Cécile-de-la-Mer. They founded, in 1882, the Federation of Shipowners and Merchants of Bouville "to bring together in one powerful group all men of good will, to cooperate in the work of national reconstruction and to hold in check the parties of disorder. . . . " They have made Bouville the French commercial port best equipped for unloading coal and wood. The lengthening and widening of the docks was their work. They enlarged the Maritime Station as much as was desirable and, by constant dredging, brought the depth of the anchorage basin at low tide to thirty-five feet. In twenty years the tonnage of fishing boats, which was 5,000 tons in 1869, was raised, thanks to them, to 18,000 tons. Stopping at no sacrifice to aid the rise of the best representatives of the working class, they created, of their own initiative, various centers of technical and professional training, which have prospered under their lofty protection. They broke the famous dock strike of 1898 and gave their sons to the fatherland in 1914.

The women, worthy companions of these champions, founded most of the Benevolent Societies, Day Nurseries, Women's Workhouses. But they were, above all, wives and mothers. They brought up fine children, taught them their duties and their rights, religion, respect of the traditions which have made France.

The usual color of these portraits was a sombre brown. The livelier colors had been banished for the sake of decency. However, in the portraits by Renaudas, who preferred to paint old men, the snow of the hair and whiskers cut across black backgrounds; he excelled in painting hands. In the case of Bordurin, who had fewer tricks, the hands were somewhat sacrificed but the collars shone like white marble.

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It was very warm and the guard snored gently. My glance roved over the walls: I saw hands and eyes; here and there a spot of light blotted out a face. As I turned towards the portrait of Olivier Blévigne, something held me back: from the arch the merchant Pacôme focussed his clear gaze upon me.

He was standing, his head thrown slightly back, one hand holding against his pearl gray trousers a fashionable high hat and gloves. I could not keep back a certain admiration: I saw nothing mediocre about him, nothing to criticize: small feet, fine hands, the broad shoulders of a champion, discreet elegance, with a suggestion of humor. He offered courteously to visitors his clean-cut, unlined face; the shadow of a smile hovered at his lips. But his grey eyes did not smile. He must have been fifty: he looked as young and fresh as thirty. He was handsome.

I gave up the chance to catch him in the wrong. But he would not let me go. I read in his eyes a calm and unyielding judgment.

I understood then all that separated us: what I might think of him did not touch him, it was a bit of psychology, as in novels. But his judgment pierced me like a sword, putting in question my very right to exist. And it was true, I had always taken this into account: I did not have the right to exist. I had come into being by chance, I existed as did a stone, a plant, a microbe. My being sprouted with little joy and in every direction. Sometimes it sent me vague signals; at other times I felt nothing but a humming without meaning.

But for this handsome faultless man, today deceased, for Jean Pacôme, son of Pacôme of the National Guard, it had been very different: the beat of his heart and the muffled noises of his organs reached him in the form of small instantaneous and unadulterated rights. For sixty years, unfalteringly, he had made use of the right to live. Magnificent grey eyes! Never had the slightest doubt crossed them. Never, never had Pacôme been wrong.

He had always done his duty, his entire duty, his duty as son, husband, father, as leader. He had claimed his rights unhesitatingly: as a child, the right to be well brought up in a closely knit family, of inheriting a spotless name, a prosperous business; as a husband, the right to be cared for, surrounded by tender affection; as a father, the right to be looked up to as leader, the right of protesting obedience. For a right is never more than another form of duty. His extraordinary success (the Pacômes are today the richest family in Bouville) must never have astonished him. He had never said to himself that he was happy, and when he took his pleasure he felt

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obliged to yield to it moderately, saying "I am taking my relaxation." Thus for him pleasure, belonging also among the rights, lost its aggressive futility. On the left, a little above his blue-grey hair, I noticed some books on a shelf. The bindings were beautiful; they were surely classics. Pacôme undoubtedly read in the evening, before retiring, a few pages of "his old Montaigne" or an ode of Horace in the original Latin text. At some times, also, he must have read a contemporary work in order to keep informed. In that way he knew Barrès and Bourget. After a moment he would put down the book and smile. His expression, losing its admirable alertness, becoming almost dreamy, he would say: "How much easier, and yet how much more difficult, it is to do one's duty."

He would never return again to the subject of himself; here was a leader.

There were other leaders hanging on the walls: there was nothing else. Here was a leader, this grand old man, grey-green against his armchair, his white shirt-front a happy touch echoing the silver of his hair. (In these portraits, painted always with moral instruction as their end and with an exactness verging on scrupulousness, artistic considerations were not passed over.) His long slender hand rested on the head of a little boy. On his knees, which were wrapped in a blanket, lay an open book. But his gaze was far away. He was all the things which are invisible to young people. His name was written on a plaque of gilt wood beneath his portrait: it must have been Pacôme, or Parrottin, or Chairneau. I did not think of looking: for his kin, for this child, for himself, he was simply Grandfather; at the moment when he judged that the time had come to reveal to his grandson the scope of his future duties, he would speak of himself in the third person.

"You must promise your grandfather to be very good, my dear, to work hard next year. Perhaps next year grandfather will no longer be here."

In the evening of life, he extends to everyone his indulgent kindness. Even I, if he saw me—but he gazed right through me—even I would find pardon in his eyes: he would think that I had had grandparents once. He would demand nothing: one no longer has desires at that age. Nothing, save that one should lower one's voice slightly when he entered; save that there should be at his passing a shadow of tenderness and respect in the smiles; nothing save that his daughter-in-law should say sometimes: "Father is extraordinary; he is younger than all of us"; save that he should be the only one able to calm

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the passions of his grandson, putting his hands on his head and saying: "Your grandfather knows how to soothe those great cares"; nothing, save that his sons, many times a year, should seek his advice on delicate questions; nothing, finally, save to feel calm, appeased, infinitely wise. The hand of the old gentleman scarcely weighed on the curls of his grandson: it was almost a benediction. What could he be thinking of? Of his honorable past, which conferred the right to pronounce on everything, to have the last word on everything. I had not gone far enough the other day: Experience was much more than a defense against death; it was a right: the right of old men.

General Aubry, hung over the arch, with his great sabre, was a leader. A leader too, President Hébert, refined and cultivated, a friend of Impetraz. His face was long and symmetrical with an endless chin, punctuated, exactly under his lip, by an imperial; he stuck out his jaw a little, with the amused air of someone making a *distinguo,* of setting in motion an objection of principle, like a faint belch. He was dreaming, he was holding a goose-feather quill: he too, you can bet, was taking his relaxation, and it was by composing verses. But he had the eagle eye of the leaders.

And the soldiers? I was in the center of the hall, the target of all those grave eyes. I was neither grandfather, nor father, nor even a husband. I did not vote, I paid, if at all, a few taxes: I could boast neither the rights of one who contributes, nor of an elector, nor even the humble right to honorableness which twenty years of obedience confer upon an employee. My existence began seriously to amaze me. Was I not simply a presence?

"Ah," I said to myself suddenly, "I am the soldier!" That made me smile, bearing no grudge.

A plump gentleman of about fifty politely returned me a fine smile. Renaudas had painted him with love, he had no stroke too tender for the little ears, plump and carved, above all for the hands, long, nervous, with loose fingers: in truth the hands of an intellectual or an artist. His face was unknown to me: I must have passed the canvas often without noticing it. I approached and read "Rémy Parrottin, born in Bouville in 1849, professor at the School of Medicine in Paris."

Parrottin: Dr. Wakefield had spoken to me of him: "Once in my lifetime I met a great man. He was Rémy Parrottin. I took his course the winter of 1904 (you know I spent two years in Paris studying obstetrics). He made me understand what a leader is. He had the stuff, I swear. He electrified us, he led us to the end of the

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world. And yet he was a "gentleman": he had a huge fortune, a good part of which he gave away to help poor students."

Thus this prince of science, the first time I heard speak of him, had inspired me with strong feelings. Now I stood before him and he smiled at me. What intelligence and affability in his smile! His plump body sank softly into the hollows of the great leather armchair. This wise man, without pretentiousness, put people at their ease immediately. He would have been taken for a good fellow except for the spirituality of his gaze.

It didn't take long to guess the reason for his prestige: he was loved because he understood everything, one could tell him everything. On the whole, he resembled Renan a little, with more distinction. He was one of those who say:

"The Socialists? Oh well, I go farther than they do" Following him down this perilous path, one had soon to abandon, shuddering, family, country, property rights, one's most sacred values. One even doubted for a moment the right of the bourgeois elite to command. One step further and suddenly everything was re-established on the ancient footing, marvelously founded on solid reasoning. Returning, one perceived behind one, already distant and small, the socialists waving their handkerchiefs, crying "Wait for us."

I knew also, through Wakefield, that the Master loved, as he himself admitted with a smile, "to deliver souls." Having remained young, he surrounded himself with youth: he often received young people of good family who were destined to become doctors. Wakefield had been to dinner at his home many times. After dinner they went into the smoking room. The Master treated as men these students who were not yet far from their first cigarets: he offered them cigars. He would stretch himself out on a couch and talk at length, his eyes half-closed, surrounded by the avid group of disciples. He recalled memories, told stories, drawing from them a piquant and profound moral. And when among these well-brought-up young people there was one who showed a vigorous mind, Parrottin became particularly interested in him. He made him talk, listened attentively, gave him ideas, things to think about. It happened by chance that one day the young man, overflowing with ideas, excited by the hostility of his family, weary of thinking alone and in opposition to everyone else, demanded that the Master receive him alone, and, stammering in his timidity, delivered himself of his most intimate thoughts, his indignations, his hopes. Parrottin pressed him to his heart. He said: "I understand you, I have understood you since the first day." They talked

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and Parrottin went still further, so far that the young man had difficulty in following him. After several interviews of this sort one could observe a considerable improvement in the young rebel. He looked clearly at himself, he learned to recognize the deep ties which attached him to his family and his environment; and, finally, he understood the admirable role of the elite. In the end, as if under a spell, the stray sheep who had followed Parrottin step by step, found his way back to the sheepfold, enlightened and repentant. "He has cured more souls," concluded Wakefield, "than I bodies."

Rémy Parrottin smiled at me affably. He hesitated, he was trying to understand my position, in order to turn me gently and lead me into the fold. But I was not afraid of him: I was no sheep. I looked at his fine forehead, calm and unwrinkled, his little paunch, the hand spread out flat upon his knee. I returned his smile and left him.

Jean Parrottin, his brother, president of the S.A.B., leaned with both hands on the edge of a table loaded with papers; in every way his attitude indicated to the visitor that the interview had come to an end. His gaze was extraordinary; it was almost an abstraction, shining with pure authority. His burning eyes devoured his whole face. Beneath this conflagration I perceived the thin, tightly pressed lips of the mystic. "It's funny," I thought, "he looks like Rémy Parrottin." I turned towards the Great Master; an examination in the light of this resemblance unexpectedly brought out in his gentle features a suggestion of aridity and desolation, the family look. I turned back to Jean Parrottin.

This man had the simplicity of a single idea. There was no more to him than a few bones, some dead flesh, and Pure Right. A true case of possession, I thought. When Right gets hold of a man, no amount of exorcism can drive it out; Jean Parrottin had devoted his entire life to contemplating his Right: nothing else. Instead of the faint headache which I felt starting up, as it does each time I visit a museum, he had felt in his day the painful right to be cared for. It was not at all necessary that he be made to think too much, that his attention be drawn to unpleasant realities, to his possible death, to the sufferings of other men. Doubtless on his death bed, at that hour at which it has been the custom since Socrates to make a noble speech, he had said to his wife, as an uncle of mine said to his wife after she had watched over him for twelve nights: "I do not thank you, Thérèse. You have only done your duty." When a man reaches that point, you have to take off your hat to him.

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His eyes, into which I stared in amazement, dismissed me. I did not leave, I was resolutely indiscreet. I knew, from long study of a certain portrait of Philip II in the library of the Escurial, that when one looks directly at a face that dazzles with its right, after a moment the fire becomes extinguished, leaving a residue of ashes: it was this residue which interested me.

Parrottin put up a good fight. But suddenly his eyes lost their fire, the picture became spiritless. What was left? Sightless eyes, the mouth, dried up like a dead snake, the cheeks. The pale round cheeks of a child: they sprawled on the canvas. The employees of S.A.B. had never suspected their existence: they did not stay long enough in Parrottin's office. When they entered they came up against this terrible gaze as against a wall. But behind it, in concealment, were the cheeks, white and soft. After how many years had his wife noticed them. Two years? Five years? One day, I imagine, as her husband slept at her side, a moonbeam caressing his nose, or perhaps in daytime as he lay back in an armchair, laboriously digesting his dinner, his eyes half-closed, a stream of sunlight on his chin, she had dared look him in the face: all that flesh had appeared defenceless, puffy, drivelling, vaguely obscene. Undoubtedly from that day on Mme. Parrottin had taken command.

I moved back a few steps so as to take in at one glance all these great personages: Pacôme, President Hébert, the two Parrottins, General Aubry. They had worn fashionable high hats; on Sundays they met in Tournebride Street Mme. Gratien, the wife of the mayor, who saw Saint Cecilia in a dream. They greeted her with fine ceremonial bows, the secret of which has been lost.

They had been painted with great exactness; however, under the brush, their faces had been stripped of the mysterious weakness of the faces of men. Their faces, even the flabbiest, were as tidy as pieces of crockery: I sought there in vain some kinship with the trees and the beasts, with thoughts of earth or water. I thought that they certainly had not felt that necessity in their lifetimes. But at the moment of passing over into posterity they had entrusted themselves to a fashionable painter, so that he might discreetly work into their faces the dredgings, the drillings, the irrigations by which they had transformed the sea and the fields all around Bouville. Thus, with the assistance of Renaudas and Bordurin, they had mastered all Nature: outside themselves and within themselves. What these gloomy canvases offered my eyes was man reworked by man, with the finest conquest of man as their only adornment: the bouquet of the Rights

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of Man and of the Citizen. I admired without reservation the reign of man.

A lady and gentleman had entered. They were dressed in black and were trying to be inconspicuous. They stopped, dumbfounded, on the threshold, and the gentleman uncovered his head instinctively.

"Ah! Wonderful!" said the woman, deeply moved.

The man recovered his composure more quickly. He spoke in a tone of respect.

"It's a whole epoch!"

"Yes," said the woman, "it is the epoch of my grandmother."

They took a few steps and met the eyes of Jean Parrottin. The woman stood gaping, but the man was not proud: he had a humble air, he must have been very familiar with intimidating looks and brief interviews. He pulled gently at his wife's arm:

"Look at this one," he said.

The smile of Rémy Parrottin had always put the humble at their ease. The wife approached and read carefully.

"Portrait of Rémy Parrottin, born in Bouville, in 1849, Professor of the School of Medicine in Paris, by Renaudas."

"Parrottin, of the Academy of Science," said her husband, "by Renaudas, of the Institute. This is History!"

The woman nodded, looking at the Great Master.

"How fine he is," she said, "what an intelligent face!"

The husband made a sweeping gesture.

"These are the people who have made Bouville," he said simply.

"It's a fine thing to have put them here all together," said the woman softly.

We were three soldiers going through drill in this great room. The husband, who was smiling quietly and respectfully, glanced at me uneasily and ceased smiling abruptly. I turned and planted myself before the portrait of Olivier Blévigne. A sweet feeling of joy ran through me: indeed! I was right. It was really too funny!

The woman was approaching me.

"Gaston," she said, suddenly made bold, "come here!"

The husband came towards us.

"I say," she went on, "there's a street named after this one: Olivier Blévigne. You know, the little street that goes up Green Hill, just before you get to Jouxtebouville."

She added after a moment:

"He doesn't look goodnatured."

"No. The gripers have to have somebody to talk to."

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The phrase was addressed to me. The man looked at me out of the corner of his eye and began to laugh, this time aloud, in a fatuous, fidgety manner, as though he himself were Olivier Blévigne.

Olivier Blévigne did not laugh. He stuck his receding jaw and protruding Adam's apple out at us.

There was a moment of silence and rapture.

"You'd think he was about to move," said the woman.

The husband obligingly explained. "He was a big cotton merchant. Afterwards he went into politics and became a Deputy."

I knew him. Two years ago I consulted on this subject the "Little Dictionary of the Great Men of Bouville," by Abbé Morellet. I had copied the article.

"Blévigne, Olivier-Martial, son of preceding, born and died in Bouville (1849-1908), studied law in Paris and took degree in 1872. Deeply impressed by the insurrection of the Commune, which had forced him, like so many Parisians, to take shelter in Versailles under the protection of the National Assembly, he swore, at an age when young people think only of pleasure, "to devote his life to re-establishing Order." He kept his word: on his return to our city he founded the famous Order Club, which brought together every evening, for many years, the principal merchants and shipowners of Bouville. This aristocratic circle, of which it has been said jokingly that it was harder to get into it than into the Jockey, exercised up until 1908 a wholesome influence on the destiny of our great commercial port. Olivier Blévigne married in 1880 Marie-Louise Pacôme, eldest daughter of the merchant Charles Pacôme (see this name) and founded at the death of the latter, the house Pacôme-Blévigne and Son. Shortly afterwards he turned to active politics and announced his candidacy for membership in the Chamber of Deputies.

" 'The country,' he said in a famous speech, 'suffers from the gravest of illnesses: the ruling class no longer wishes to rule. And who then will rule, gentlemen, if those whom heredity, education, experience, have rendered the best trained for the exercise of power, push it aside in resignation or weariness? I have often said: to rule is not a right of the elite, it is its principal duty. Gentlemen: I entreat you: let us restore the principle of authority!'

"Elected for his first term October 4, 1885, he was constantly re-elected thereafter. He gave numerous and brilliant speeches, full of rough and powerful eloquence. He was in Paris in 1898 when the terrible strike broke out. He rushed back to Bouville, where he organized resistance to the strike and took the initiative in negotiating

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with the strikers. These negotiations, inspired by a spirit of generous conciliation, were interrupted by the violence in Jouxtebouville. It is known that a discreet use of troops brought them to their senses.

"The premature death of his son Octave, entered very young at the Polytechnical School, and of whom he wished 'to make a leader,' dealt a terrible blow to Olivier Blévigne. He never recovered from it and died two years later in February 1908.

"Collections of speeches: *Moral Strength* (1894. Out of print), *The Duty to Punish* (1900. The speeches in this collection were all made in connection with the Dreyfus affair. Out of print), *Will* (1902. Out of print). After his death his last speeches and some personal letters were collected under the title *Labor Improbus* (Plon, 1910). Iconography: there is an excellent portrait of him by Bordurin in the museum of Bouville."

An excellent portrait, so be it. Olivier Blévigne wore a small black moustache and his olive complexion somewhat resembled that of Maurice Barrès. The two men were certainly acquainted: they sat on the same benches. But the Representative from Bouville did not have the nonchalance of the President of the League of Patriots. He was as stiff as a post and sprang out of the canvas like a jack in the box. His eyes flashed: the pupils were black, the cornea reddish. He pinched his little fat lips together and pressed his right hand to his heart.

How it had bothered me, this portrait! Sometimes Blévigne had seemed to me too great and at other times too small. But today I knew what held me to it.

I had learned the truth while turning the pages of *Satirique Bouvillois*. The November 6, 1905 number was entirely devoted to Blévigne. He was represented on the cover, minute, hanging to the name of Father Combes, with this legend: The Lion's Flea. From the first page everything was explained: Olivier Blévigne was 5 feet ¼ inch tall. They were jeering at the small stature and the frog's pipe which had more than once held enthralled the entire Chamber of Deputies. He was accused of putting rubber lifts inside the heels of his boots. On the other hand, Mme. Blévigne, nee Pacôme, was a horse. "To tell the truth," added the chronicler, "his better half is twice his size."

5 feet ¼ inch! Yes indeed: Bordurin, with jealous care, surrounded him by those objects by which there was no risk at all of belittling him; an ottoman, a low armchair, a whatnot containing some duodecimo volumes, a small Persian coffee table. Only, he gave

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him the same height as he gave the neighboring Jean Parrottin and the two canvases have the same dimensions. The result is that the coffee table in the first is almost as large as the huge table in the other and the ottoman would have come up to Parrottin's shoulder. The eye instinctively makes a comparison between the two portraits: my uneasiness had come from that.

At the moment I felt like laughing: 5 feet ¼ inch! If I had wanted to talk to Blévigne, I would have had to bend over or go down on my knees. It no longer astonished me that he pointed his nose so impetuously in the air: the destiny of men of this height is always played out some inches above their heads.

The wonderful power of art! From this little man with the shrill voice nothing passed into posterity but a menacing face, a superb gesture and the bloodshot eyes of a bull. The student terrorized by the Commune, the tiny, passionate member of the Chamber of Deputies; these were the things death had taken. But thanks to Bordurin, the President of the Order Club, the orator of *Moral Strength,* was immortal.

"Oh! The poor kid!"

A stifled cry came from the woman: under the portrait of Octave Blévigne, "son of the preceding," a pious hand had traced these words:

"Died at Polytechnical School in 1904."

"He died! Like the Arondel boy. He looked intelligent. How much grief it must have caused his mother! Besides they work too hard in those big schools. Your brain is working even when you sleep. I like these two-cornered hats, they're very stylish. Shakos, do you call them?"

"No; the shakos are worn at Saint-Cyr."

I contemplated in turn the student who had died young. His waxen complexion and conservative moustache would have been enough to suggest the approach of death. Moreover, he had foreseen his destiny: a certain resignation could be read in the clear eyes looking into the distance. But at the same time he carried his head high; in this uniform he represented the French Army.

Tu Marcellus eris! Manibut date lilia plenis. . . .

A cut rose, a dead polytech student: what can be sadder?

I followed leisurely the course of the long gallery, paying my respects, without stopping, to the distinguished faces which sprang out of the shadows: M. Bossoire, President of the Chamber of Commerce, M. Faby, President of the Administrative Council of the

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autonomous port of Bouville, M. Boulange, merchant, with his family, M. Rannequin, Mayor of Bouville, M. de Lucien, born in Bouville, ambassador from France to the United States and poet, an unknown in the garb of a prefect, Sister Sainte-Marie-Louise, Mother Superior of the big orphanage, M. and Mme. Thérèson, M. Thiboust-Gouron, Acting President of the board of arbitration between employers and workers, M. Robot, principal administrator for the seamen's conscription, M. Brion, Minette, Grelot, Lefèbvre, Dr. and Mme. Pain, Bordurin himself, painted by his son Pierre Bordurin. Clear, cool gazes, refined features, thin lips. M. Boulange was thrifty and patient, Sister Sainte-Marie-Louise piously industrious, M. Thiboust-Gouron was hard on himself as on everyone else. Mme. Thérèson struggled unflaggingly against an obscure disease. Her mouth, infinitely weary, was sufficient evidence of her suffering. But never had this pious woman said, "I feel ill." She got the upper hand: she composed menus and presided over charitable organizations. Sometimes, in the middle of a phrase, her eyelids would drop slowly and the life would go out of her face. This faintness would last hardly more than a second; soon Mme. Thérèson would re-open her eyes, take up her interupted phrase. And it was whispered in the workhouse: "Poor Mme. Thérèson! She never complains."

I had covered the entire length of the Bordurin-Renaudas Salon. I turned back. Farewell fair lilies, delicate in your little painted sanctuaries, farewell fair lilies, our pride and our reason for existence, farewell stinkers.

(*Translated by Juliette Bigney*)

CORRECTION: Paul Hagen's review in our Winter issue of *Germany Is Our Problem,* by Henry Morgenthau, contained an unfortunate typographical error. The phrase, "the Hun-hunting of the Church of England," should have read "the Hun-hunting of Churchillian England."

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TWO DRAWINGS BY HENRI MATISSE, PARIS 1942, 1944
(*Courtesy Pierre Matisse Gallery, New York*)

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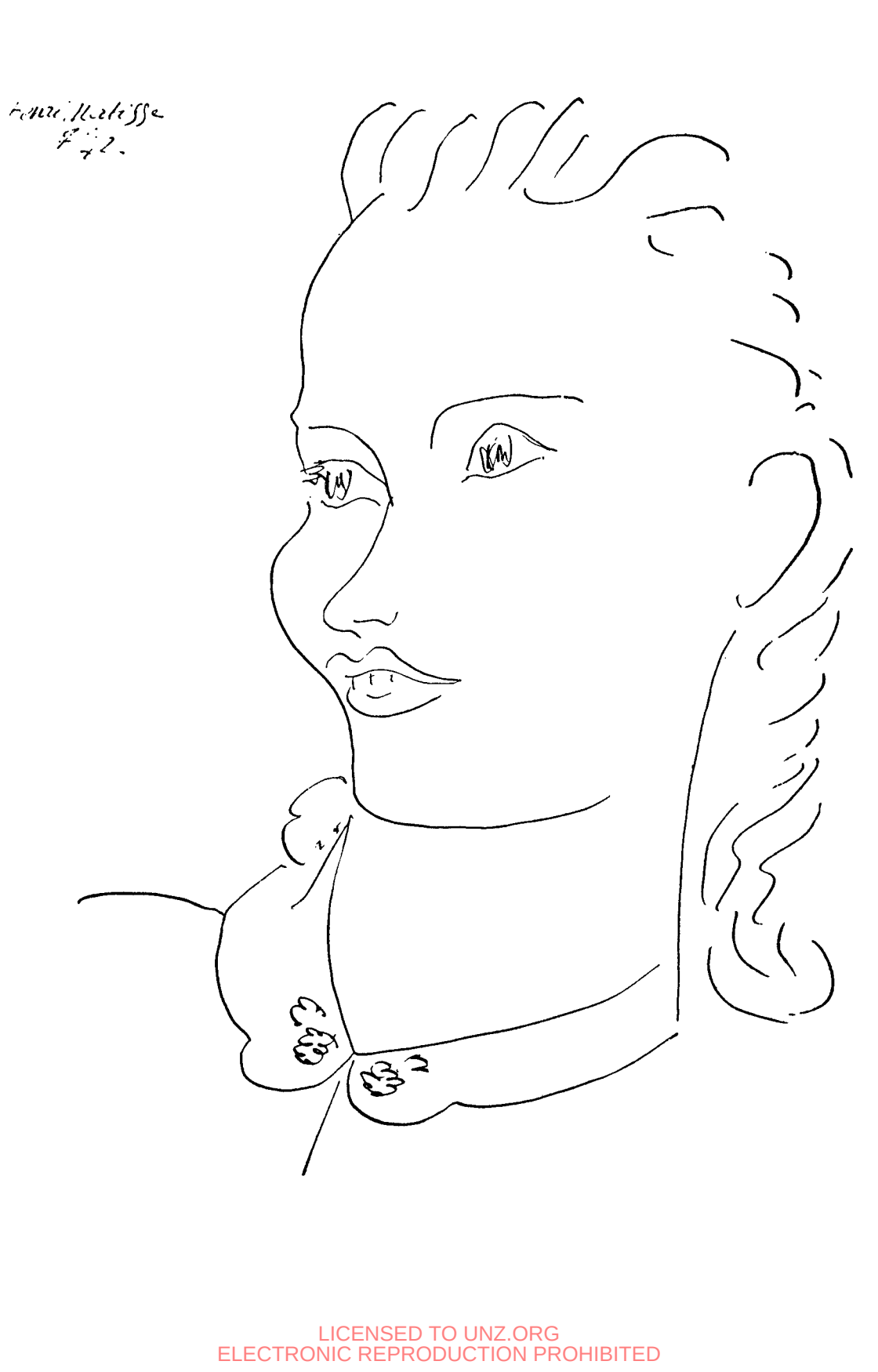

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The Gash

GEORGES BLIN

THE MALE satisfaction which is born of the act of gashing must be considered in connection with some guilty forms of our sadism. Any form of integrity provokes us.

We do not resist the joy of scribbling on a freshly whitewashed surface. Any zone of purity as a portion of the absolute scoffs at us; he who cannot subdue it, soils it. It is the vindictive consciousness of our imperfection which condemns us to allow nothing to remain intact. In this way we see that rape far from satisfying an excess of energy only affirms an overflow of impotence. It is not hunger, but the need to wound, to gash, to vilify which incites us to leave our tooth-marks in a piece of fruit which, upon reconsidering, we decide not to eat. Cruelty proceeds from envenomed despair. The vandal of necessity judges by its value the edifice which he destroys. Who, with the exception of the idolator, would waste his time spitting upon an idol? He who decapitates flowers is but the obsessed victim of his artistic inferiority.[1] We will note inversely that admiration is not unaccompanied by a desire to destroy. This too visibly satisfying body of a young woman, this too inhumanly complete and self-sufficient landscape that forces us into a spectator's exteriority, how willingly would we ravage it—out of sheer fervor! We only know intimately that which we have dismembered. We truly love only *with fury*. Let us admit it once and for all that beauty fills us with *indignation!* The only man who is satisfied by a work of art is the barbarian who consciously destroys it. That is why the dilettante always becomes an incendiary in the end.

The pleasure of gashing is based on this general need of reducing and damaging. But it receives its modalities from a complex which is quite differently characterized: the penchant coupled with horror which brings us to mutilate ensembles which are too finished or forms which are too regular. Peter Breughel was able to exorcize with an amazing luxury of detail and in a satanic swarming this criminal need to split and amputate. Certain of his prints present a nightmarish heap of monsters armed with swords and cutlasses who, though fabulously mutilated themselves, are cutting to the quick the flesh of other painting demons. But the sadism of the gash contains infinitely more than that

1. Baudelaire: *A Girl Too Gay*: "And the spring and verdure have so humiliated my heart that I punished a flower for the insolence of Nature."

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of the simple lesion. First of all there is the voluptuousness of cutting. Piercing offers no great satisfaction. The point obtains but a theoretical and abstract success; to put it more clearly, a utopian success. But the blade plays on the nerves like a sensitive and cold bow. Its light, decisive edge possesses singular powers of analysis. The point never does more than affirm its original hole. But the blade runs through the flesh like a streak of well-directed lightning, or more insistent, progresses according to the dialectical dichotomy of the saw. It leaves a groove so sure, so pertinently scientific that the mind is satisfied by it while the flesh suffers. Further superiority over the needle: the blade offers transversal satisfactions very *largely* exclusive of the cluster of possible lines which we like to see cleanly divided by an irrefutable hiatus.

It would appear, however, that the incision is not the most delectable portion of the art of gashing. For the incision is more an act of cutting off than of simply cutting, of withdrawing the portion which we have triangularly isolated from the scope of action. The subsisting concavity will be lasting evidence of our personal intervention. For after all the portion which has been cut out is of no value for all the trouble it has been worth. The blade is unable to exact even a tithe when led perpendicularly: it draws strong lines on the surface of the plane or divides into two or three the thickness into which it ventures. But, as in a puzzle, when no piece is missing, the whole thing can be put together at a glance. The gash alone, therefore, can satisfy the sadist, the gash alone reduces effectively, deprives the wounded of the positive aspect of his wound in such a way that the two lips of the wound can never come together nor the insolence be repaired by literal cicatrization.

The readily technical vocabulary of the gasher must not delude us as to the nature of his preoccupations which are of a sexual order. If this form of cruelty is in such perfect harmony with our operative reflexes, our manual dispositions, it is not only because it is tied up with the essential gestures of forcing exits (the well, the furrow, the mine) or of freeing, disgorging (sap, rosin, pus), or of grafting, scarifying, indenting or notching . . . but because above all it carries to consummate effectiveness the male obsession with the fissure. Jung states somewhere that "the gash symbolizes the female sexual organ." There is no doubt about this. But there is more to it. The gash is the rent which remains open, that is—offered and viable. It is likewise the passage opened by force, the yawning *sinus* that rape has created, the crevice which succeeds a breaking open. The Freudian will then tell us why the schoolboy so furiously gashes his desk. And we will note that P. J. Jouve, presenting the first couple in the solitude of his *Paradise Lost,* points out in a casual

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parenthesis the two sexually most important gestures:

He loves to carve in bark
She loves to lift her legs. . . .

We can add that the act of cutting into something has in many cases something disloyal which is not displeasing to us. The real gash—the gash that cuts half-way into wood as in a whistle, picks the weak point on the bias or on the diagonal of the line it breaks. The woodcutter's hatchet knows well the perfidy of the oblique. It never attacks straight on, that is to say at a right angle, the branch in which it inscribes its blow.

We get an additional joy by virtue of the fact that the gash introduces the jag, the irregularity, the *infraction*. It contradicts the homogeneity of a vanishing line by a contingent fold. It nips with a fortuitous *hic* the abstract and undisturbed straightness that joins two infinites. It represents historical catastrophe. The continuity of a virgin edge, the image of an uninterrupted development inflicts upon us to the point of nausea the picture of a world that could exist without us. We must suspend this line, this continuity, leave the mark of our bite upon it, we must intervene whatever the cost, in this process of anonymity. The gash is the quaver which attests to our presence in the vast possibility of the musical staff, it is the point of reference, the element of gradation, it is above all, since it occurs at the meeting point of two incisions which cross, the stop notch, the punctual *nunc* which cuts the unbearable line of becoming. It is the principle of a discontinuity the measure of which finds the use, the guarantee of a singularity, which our misfortunes have constituted and, in short, our refusal to become involved in the conspiracies of perpetuity. Whence the fact that any gash denies the existence of time. The prisoner marks the passing of each day with a notch. And if lovers carve their initials in bark, is it not in truth because they are defying time?

Every mark we make is a mark of our superiority: every imprint bail for our effectiveness. Does not every mark in fact represent the battlefield, the record and in the true sense the *monument* of a success? Now no trace fills us with as much joy as the gash inflicted for instance on the tempting grain of a fine white board. This is because the gash is born of cruelty and bears testimony to violence, to successful blows. We perceive thereby that the voluptuousness of gashing goes back in large part to the pleasure one feels in overcoming objective resistance: the joy of being or of guiding the hardest instrument, of acting in the nature of a most bruising salient and of imprinting one's *design* on a yielding material. The blinding imperialism of the most resistant protuberance—

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of the plough, of the diamond, of the dagger, of teeth! Trial of strength, trial of the self which wants to tear only in denial of perfection, as a mortgage on integrity, just as one *cuts short* an objection. Let us break open the gap! At least we will have left our mark. For lack of anything else, each of us carves his name in marble or on a prison wall. That is writing it in the true sense, since writing it means inscribing it. The man of letters *brands* passive wax or parchment. In the final analysis, the pencil might even cleave the slate and the pen cut shapes of freakish garret windows out of a sheet of paper. Is style not determined after all by an original way of bearing down, by a certain power of insistence? It is to be measured by the depth of my "impressions," by which I mean the characters which my point picks out in the thickness of my tablet. Creation is incisive. It is thought out destruction. He who affirms himself, eliminates me proportionally. A note, a word bores holes in reticent plasticity. The artist is worth his refusal: he begins by shutting one eye, by cutting out an object, and then he takes two or three steps back as if he were fighting a duel! Challenge? Provocation? At least denial. He judges himself by what he cuts off, what he cuts out of the world.

Stylization corresponds to a kind of subversive surgery. The inventor is a nihilist who begins again with the universe in its original state of nakedness. The sculptor with chisel and hammer in hand looks like an iconoclast indeed! What does the painter do if not methodically soil his canvas? And the poet but ravage his language like a madman? So it is true that no one stamps himself upon the world except by carving on it a virile signature.

(*Translated by Mary Guggenheim*)

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Modern Painting and the Ill-Kept Secret

JEAN PAULHAN

EVERY DAY modern painting is subjected to all manner of criticism, none of which is worthy of the slightest attention. When a great critic claims that the painters of today leave their canvases unfinished because they are lazy, he exhibits but one thing, namely the laziness of the great critic. The gentleman who does not like a picture because it is ugly does not know that one can love an ugly woman madly—for charms which transcend those of beauty. As for the other gentleman who feels that one should not paint green cows or men with crab claws because man has well-defined hands and because cows are not green, that person does not even deserve a serious answer. Presently he will criticize Fra Angelico for having painted angels, and Delacroix for having painted Liberty. Of course, there are neither angels nor Liberty in nature. No. However such strange things do come to pass in nature that, if there were no such thing as Liberty, all hope of understanding anything about nature would have to be abandoned. (And if there lives a man who has never felt wings sprouting from his back, so much the worse for him.) Now it is the very function of painting to remind us of these wings; to enable us to believe in their existence. I do not know whether there are too many pictures in the world. I do not believe so. But were there but one, we would see an angel riding on the back of a green cow, and as we know the most humble graffiti adorn with wings those things which never had them.

And yet there is a bit of truth in these absurd reproaches: it is true that modern painting has its danger or weakness. It certainly has a right to paint green cows or cubes and crab claws, and to be satisfied with the result. But perhaps it is a little more complacent than it should be. It is too grossly complacent; with too much indiscretion, one might say. Fra Angelico made angels as if angels were perfectly natural. Delacroix portrayed Liberty as if he had seen her among men like you and me. But more than one painter of today has at least this trait in common with his enemies: he seems to think it is extraordinary to paint green cows or cubes—that that is the height of daring, and that this alone entitles him to strut.

One need only listen to them. Their inadequacy is so obvious that it

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emerges clearly from their words and their doctrine, in fine, from their great discovery.

For they have made a discovery. They have found nothing less than the secret of painting. However, they promptly proved themselves unequal to their discovery. Therefore, we must conclude that they were not altogether worthy (or was it the intoxication of discovery that carried them away?). Juan Gris, for one, aptly observed that there was no classical work which did not hide a scrupulously elaborated calculation of design, relief and golden sectors. But Juan Gris himself was not always able to disguise his own calculations. Delaunay rightly pointed out that a beautiful painting always murmurs some cosmic rhythm; but Delaunay does not whisper his rhythms at all; he utters them aloud; truth to tell, he shouts them. Fernand Leger justly supposes that a canvas is necessarily filled with delicate allusions to spheres and cubes; but Fernand Leger, though he has color sense, does not, on the other hand, have the gift of delicate allusion. By means of diagrams and plans, André Lhote has admirably established the fact that the great landscape composition of Rubens or of Breughel suggests a whole gearing of cylinders and cones on a helicoidal background. I willingly admit that. But I fear that the canvasses of André Lhote sometimes resemble theorems rather than suggestions. In short, painters between 1900 and 1920 discovered that good painting had always had its secret implications. And they hastened, these painters, to shout them from the house-tops. They did not see fit to guard their secret and to cherish it. And for this reason their work looks so unfinished.

For, if I may say so, an allusion that one explains no longer has the charm of an allusion. A secret that one shouts from the house-tops obviously no longer has the virtue of a secret. If cones and cylinders give Rubens such charm, it may be quite simply because they are cones and cylinders; but above all, their effectiveness may rest in the fact that no one recognizes them as such. And I do not have to go very far to find the proof: for the angles, the spirals and even the mobile planes which Matila Ghyka, Powers or Funck-Heller so shrewdly substitute for the Holy Family or for the "Arm Chair Madonna" are far from offering the faintest beginning of charm. It is certainly curious to find the curve of the Medievals in the Madonnas of Gleizes. But in the Medievals, the curve made a splendid rainbow whereas in Gleizes it is only a poor little curve. That is the danger of indiscretion.

I have heard it said that painters need not concern themselves with clear reasoning, that that is not their function, but rather that they should bring the logicians and the men of intellect to acknowledge all that transcends human intelligence and human reason. Most assuredly!

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But the fault goes deeper; and what I reproach painters with is not so much that they created the fault, as that they have not been able to shield us from it. It is mine, it is yours; it is the fault of a whole era unfit for mystery to the point of refusing to recognize it where it is manifest or, if I may say so, where it is flagrantly obvious.

I am not even thinking of a State which dispenses integral education (whether in the field of ethics or poetry), organizes leisure (when leisure, by its very nature, must elude regimentation), makes legal status a matter of such consequence that even cows and ducks must have their classification; which demands a declaration of our diseases (even if they be secret ones), and evidently has no other ideal than to constrain us to live and to love in little glass houses. I do not think about it because it is not my business. The Fine Arts are under discussion here, and another example will be even more striking; specifically the example of houses.

It is quite true that the modern houses—those of Le Corbusier for example—are pleasant and beautiful; that they are filled with light and air; that one feels pleasure sitting at the window watching people pass by; listening (through the walls) to the neighbors' fights, raising gold fish. In short, they are excellent living machines; and the latest model, it seems, even offers a system of screws and pulleys whereby the house can be turned with the sun. Truly there is but one thing missing. A single thing, so small that it has been possible to overlook it: a dark and hidden corner, preferably a dirty one, where the tenant can on occasion withdraw and think of nothing. For man is so made that he has in himself that which sometimes rejects the sun or the neighbors, and vomits out the State, nature, all logic and common sense. . . .

Did I say that indiscretion was the defect of painting today? In any case that is its danger. It is a danger that the old masters seem to have known little of; it gives to the best among the moderns, as soon as they have been able to avoid it, some new and undefinable grandeur and weight. For in times past, it was enough for a painter to possess a secret. Today he must have something even rarer, doubtless more difficult, and which in other times related to metaphysics or religion; yet, so vital that if it is absent, his means seem meager, his design artificial, his colors thin, his very subject paltry and mean. . . . This is what I want to call the sense of the hidden. It is the sense which is so obviously lacking in Ingres or David and which Goya possesses; which is lacking in Degas or Bonnard and present in Braque and Rouault. In failing to take this sense of the hidden into consideration, aesthetic treatises become frivolous books.

(*Translated by Mary Guggenheim*)

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Books

TALENT AND CAREER OF JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

L'Etre et le Neant. *Par Jean-Paul Sartre. Gallimard.*
L'Age de Raison. Le Sursis. *Par Jean-Paul Sartre. Gallimard.*

It is reported that an overflow crowd of several thousand were turned away from a recent lecture by Sartre in Paris. New York would require Frank Sinatra or Bing Crosby at the Paramount to produce the same result. This is a tribute to France, where a literary leader can be a public figure, but even in France the quality and degree of Sartre's publicity point to something new in French letters, especially when we compare his to the literary leadership in previous generations. Mallarmé was a leader, and of the most important kind, but he created a circle of disciples and not a public movement. Valéry, as Academician and public guardian of the French spirit, and Gide, as moralist, became leaders for a wider audience, but scarcely swayed a general public. Proust was dead at the time he could have been a leader. If Sartre appears a deflated figure after these names, I make the comparison only on the basis of common leadership. But this in itself is a remarkable phenomenon, since leadership in letters now requires different qualities and confers a different status upon the writer—and in France, too.

The leader, for one thing, must now be incomparably more busy: he launches a magazine, has political views, temporizes with the Communist Party, gives lectures, pours out at least two volumes a year: plays, essays, or novels. Valéry, Gide, and Proust were *rentiers,* sons of the bourgeoisie, and they raised the happy accident of leisure into a principle of the literary work. The literary work exacted a concentrated withdrawal, the gestation of long silence and infinite strokes of retouching. But now, if the bourgeoisie still exists in western Europe, it is by the skin of its teeth, and it no longer dares to lay down its values as the values of the nation. Sartre's doctrine of *litérature engagée* does not spring full-armed from his existential philosophy; it also reflects a change going on in French society—a change ambiguous and uncertain, whose immediate future we cannot precisely measure, but which already places the literary leader in a different relation to his public.

Another historical event raises Sartre to his present eminence: the French Resistance. The Resistance required an heroic and secular philosophy, in which heroism is born out of absolute despair, out of the experience of nothingness, and Sartre, ready with his version of Heidegger, became the man for that hour. Except for the Communists, whose

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Stalinist religion supplied them with absolute imperatives to resist as soon as Germany was at war with Russia, the French were without clear and definite political ideas on which to act. If, for the most part, they resisted out of an instinctive hatred for the Germans, as foreigners and masters, they also felt they could not retain their humanity without resisting. This resistance was *absurd*: it was necessary if one were still to remain a man, but there was no well-defined end outside the act justifying it. Every act of resistance became a Heideggerian "project." As we get close to the state of mind of the Resistance, Sartre's philosophic categories become remarkably and luminously applicable. And he himself, in turn, is modified by the Resistance. The difference between the disgust of *La Nausée,* 1938, and the heroism of *Les Mouches,* 1943, is the measure of how far he has changed with the changing situation of France. Both experiences—nausea and heroism—have their place in Sartre's philosophy, but the change in emphasis is unmistakable, and just as unmistakably dictated by the external pressure of events.

Which brings us again before the perpetual and recurring problem of the writer and his limelight. The writer in America can continue to exist only by fleeing the limelight. The admiration in France for American fiction may soon indicate a situation of publishers, writers, and readers, not altogether unlike America's. The limelight can make good use of Sartre's extraordinary talents for the publicity of ideas. But the limelight, like a woman, rejects as well as accepts: a public figure, a leader, a *chef* (to use the word so hated by Sartre) must be "positive" rather than "negative," even if this involve sacrifice of the particular quality which had previously resulted in his best writing. Sensational public success makes the writer believe in the immaculate rightness of his first draft, which he now gives to the world as a finished novel. The public's clamor to know about his ideas makes him turn out an enormous manifesto, bandaged and limping at a hundred points, as a finished philosophical treatise.

In a world full of cheating, Sartre says in one of his stories, it is difficult to be honest. This idea of "bad faith," which runs through all his writing, is developed most explicitly in his *L'Etre et le Néant.* Bad faith is not merely the characteristic of the habitual liar and cheat, but a universal threat to the human condition. We practise bad faith when we confuse our status with our human reality. A waiter or a bourgeois declares: that's what I am, waiter or bourgeois. He thinks he possesses his being, as waiter or bourgeois, as stone or table is what it is, stone or table. He gives himself up to the mechanism of his function. His bad faith consists in concealing from himself that his function too depends upon his human choice. Afraid of his freedom, he conceals it from himself by pretending—and indeed striving—to be what he is and no more.

Sartre himself, now playing a public role, is compelled to practise

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"bad faith." He surrenders his being as a writer to his movement, and to the public's clamor for his books his freedom to remain withdrawn. The writer's deepest and most difficult freedom: to take his time.

2.

Sartre is undoubtedly a philosopher first, in the sense that the best things in his novels and plays for the most part simply supply the clothing of imagination for some philosophical idea. His *L'Etre et Le Néant,* which has now become the bible of French Existentialism, is therefore, despite the imposing obstacle of its 700 pages, the book by which to approach him, if we are to understand completely what he is about.

His most imposing work in range and bulk, this book is also, alas, after his last novel *Le Sursis,* his poorest performance. We are shocked that something so repetitious and verbose is the production of a literary man. Its philosophical deficiencies are equally paradoxical: it contains many original and extraordinary observations which show the author's mind genuinely at work on a subject-matter, and not merely engaged in passively transmitting a pastiche of Heidegger: but elsewhere it is so philosophically naive, abounds in such bad philosophic arguments, inconclusive arguments offered as conclusive—that we find it difficult to reconcile Sartre's obvious acuteness with his extreme naïveté and positive obtuseness. The paradox can be explained on the hypothesis that these 700 pages are a first draft for a good book of 300 pages. I have to apologize for making these statements without adequate space to demonstrate them in detail; but Heidegger himself is without any adequate treatment in English—before which the whole question of existential philosophy cannot be posed—and Sartre will have to wait his turn. Meanwhile, A. J. Ayer's long criticism in *Horizon* will do. With most of Ayer's negative criticisms I am in agreement, but I wish he did not leave the sneaking impression that he has not quite understood what the book is all about.

Bracketing the question of existential philosophy, criticism may disengage from this tome the main qualities of Sartre's mind. These qualities are displayed just as clearly in nearly every one of his essays, and PR readers familiar with his "Responsibility of Writers" will already know what they are: with great gifts for intellectual rhetoric, intellectually agile, with a genuine passion for the assimilation of ideas, Sartre lacks critical balance, the ability to perceive necessary qualifications, so that the ideas themselves seem to get the upper hand and run away with his sense of fact, which is weak to start with. *L'Etre et le Néant* magnifies these deficiencies on the scale of 700 pages.

Existentialism attempts to construct a theory of man by use of the phenomenological method: the subtitle of Sartre's book is "Essay in

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Phenomenological Ontology." Our criticism may, therefore, be condensed about two points: how ably and consistently Sartre has made use of the phenomenological method, and how intelligently he has assimilated other sources of knowledge for the understanding of man.

This first question may be examined in Sartre's treatment of time, a cardinal point in existential philosophy. As opposed to many philosophies in which time figures as an unreal appearance in the universe, Heidegger makes time of the essence. Time discloses itself as the horizon of being. Apparently taking over Heidegger's analysis, Sartre, in fact, undoes its meaning insofar as directed towards an elucidation of Being generally, since he too ends up by making time an unreal appearance. *For, according to Sartre, time does not exist in the universe apart from man: human reality brings with it into the world past, present, and future.*

This conclusion cuts altogether loose from phenomenology: it returns us to Hegel and idealism, whereas it was a principal aim of phenomenology to cut under both idealism and materialism. The point must be hammered home (since Sartre repeats this error with regard to the category of possibility) that from the phenomenological descriptions of human consciousness nothing whatever follows as to the absence of time from the universe without man. Such a conclusion does not belong to phenomenology but to speculative metaphysics. Unfortunately, Sartre makes the transition too often, too easily, and too unconsciously. Reading Sartre, in fact, we are impressed with the shrewdness of Heidegger, who, sticking more consistently to his phenomenological point of view, wields his descriptions like knifeblades to cut under unnecessary problems. Where Heidegger, with scarcely any prelude, plunges into a phenomenological description of man's being with others (*Mitsein*), Sartre consumes a great number of pages on that old chestnut: the problem of the existence of other people. We would expect that Sartre as a novelist would be sufficiently interested in the existence of other people as to be profoundly uninterested in the discussion as to whether they exist or not. The result is that Heidegger *in Sein und Zeit* says considerably more than Sartre in twice the number of pages.

Sartre has become so entangled in the mechanism of his function, like his own example of the over-attentive waiter, that he has only to produce the inferential words *ainsi on voit. . . . alors . . .* etc., in order to believe or appear to believe (and the difference between being and seeming becomes blurred) that what these words connect is a good philosophic argument. As the waiter plays at being waiter, Sartre plays at being a philosopher.

My second criticism concerns Sartre's discussion of Freud, psychoanalysis, and the unconscious. If I single out this point from the whole volume, it is because in the twentieth century any philosophic view of

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man must be measured against the science of Freud.

Sartre proceeds with characteristic intellectual exuberance: he briskly dismisses Freud, denies flatly the existence of the unconscious, and quotes one of Stekel's worst books to show that the central knot of every neurosis is conscious. One wonders what kind of experience Sartre can have had with neurotics.

Philosophers have, of course, their own particular form of resistance to Freud, and Sartre might be excused also as simply reflecting the low level of psychoanalysis in France, the one culturally advanced nation which has made no contribution to psychoanalytic knowledge. But neither excuse covers his failure to make use of such figures as Scheler and Bergson, who indicate distinct philosophic grounds for the unconscious. And phenomenology itself, when reinforced by other empirical data, would lead in the same direction. Attentive phenomenological analysis shows consciousness shading off to the unconscious; to put it paradoxically: certain conscious experiences do contain unconscious parts—a crude example of which are certain kinds of double-take in the movies.

But, philosophy aside, what about the enormous weight of empirical evidence adduced from clinical experience? When Sartre proposes to found a new kind of psychoanalysis—"existential psychoanalysis"—he strikes as frivolous and presumptuous the reader who is acquainted with the long discipline and empirical evolution which gave birth, in the case of Freud, to the concept and technique of psychoanalysis. However agile, a mind which can step off so blithely and briskly into a new science does not carry very much ballast. To paraphrase what Sartre has Orestes say of his moral conscience: "It is too light, it needs to become heavy."

Sartre rejects Freud in order to absolutize the notion of "choice of oneself," according to which man completely creates his character by his choices. He denies the existence of "character" in order to affirm the existence of "the situation." But his notion becomes self-defeating at this point: for unless we know some of the laws of formation of character, we cannot change it as we wish, and the idea of the plasticity of human nature becomes unusable and pointless. Freedom demands some determinism we can make use of. The result of Sartre's rejection of Freud shows up in his discussions of the emotions, which will seem thin and puerile to anyone acquainted with the psychoanalytic treatment of these matters, and of anti-semitism, which is inadequate to the unconscious sources of this problem.

3.

Sartre's first and best book, *La Nausée,* succeeds precisely in that the union of philosopher and creative writer is more intimately achieved in it than in any of his other books. Much as ideas, and the elaboration of ideas, figure, the author has not shirked the novelist's tasks: the remarkable thing is the life with which the ideas are invested, as forming

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the intimate texture of the hero's experience and sensibility. The quotation from Céline on the flyleaf is no idle gesture, for Céline has been as much an influence as Heidegger, and in the same direction. The Heideggerian Nothing and the nihilism of Céline are equally authentic expressions of the life of the twentieth century. Modern man has looked into the abyss, and his conception of being must now be inseparably involved with the Nothing. The book has been criticized for its disgust—a criticism which is itself a little disgusting. It forgets that no disgust could possibly be adequate to modern life. We have a right to demand of the author only that his disgust be interesting.

Sartre's disgust is perhaps less interesting than Céline's. More intellectually self-conscious and philosophically subtle, but also more static, it does not become embodied, like Céline's, in the desperate picaresque of common life and in the anonymous depths of the characters of the street. *La Nausée* is not so much a novel as an extraordinary fragment of a novel. Much as one prized its intensity and narrowness, one could also hope that the author would go on to a more straightforward novel embodying his ideas more completely in plot and character. Alas that his later novels should turn off in the direction of Jules Romains!

The collection of short-stories, *Le Mur,* falls below the level of this first novel. These stories have moments of intensity—in *Le Mur, L'Enfance d'un Chef,* and in *La Chambre,* perhaps the best of the collection—but they are also somewhat forced, and do not leave us with any powerful and lasting impression. Sartre does not have the gift of pregnant concision, which the shorter form demands, and the book reveals one thing so far lacking in him as a writer: an authentic style—the quality which can make a single page by Gide of consuming interest.

After *La Nausée, Huis Clos* is Sartre's best work. His other play, *Les Mouches* is something of a set piece which exists mainly for the sake of the thrilling eloquence in the final clash between Orestes and Jupiter. In *Huis Clos* we are closer to the center of Sartre's real talents: its intense driving energy is something we can recognize as authentically his.

The three characters are planted in Hell, where they are to be punished, as in Dante, by being given simply the logical consequence of their sin. Having practised "bad faith" in life, they now *have* what they had sought to surrender themselves to: their lives are what they are and nothing in them can be changed. They have no more being than what they have in the eyes of others. A torment, in fact, which people do choose on earth. The bourgeois and the anti-semite, Sartre says, have chosen to become only what they are in the eyes of others, to possess their being like a *thing.*

But after acknowledging the excitement and intensity of the play as theatre, we have to repeat our reservations as to the narrowness of the author's gifts. The three characters are thinly blocked out figures,

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almost single intense lines, single curves of action, so to speak, illustrating separately cowardice, Lesbianism, infanticide. After a certain point they have no surprises for us, they are without contingency—and this from an author who denies the existence of "character" as a fixed thing. Cocteau, handling the same theme, might have let it degenerate into a great deal of wisecracking, but the play would have abounded in extraordinary strokes of theare, discoveries, surprises, situations within situations; Sartre creates, instead, a melodrama—perhaps a little too "well-constructed"—that drives straight ahead, without pause, along a single line of action. We confirm here what was observed of *La Nausée*: Sartre succeeds most surely where the union of philosopher and creative writer is most intimate. The writer is always drawing secret drafts on the credit of the philosopher. This dependence, which in itself is no fault, is nevertheless, in Sartre's case, a sign of his narrower talents. What we do not get from him are those happy strokes of contingency—the faculty of abounding and arbitrary invention—which, without going to the greatest novelists, we can also find in his contemporaries, Malraux or Faulkner.

Sartre attempts to cut loose from this philosophic background in his last two novels, *L'Age de Raison* and *Le Sursis* (which are volumes I and II of a trilogy, *Les Chemins de la Liberté*). True, the hero is a young teacher of philosophy, who seems to bear a certain resemblance to Sartre himself, and the theme of the novel, the search for human liberty, is central to Sartre's philosophy. But for the actual content and form (or formlessness) Sartre throws over ideas for raw experience. The influence of the American novel triumphs. Here are the raw chunks of reality so dear to the hearts of American novelists: banal and meaningless conversations, characters wandering in and out, bars and dance-halls. American fiction is the African sculpture of French writers. A novel by Steinbeck or Dos Passos has the same fascination of the primitive and exotic that a Gold Coast carving had for the French painters at the beginning of the century. But *caveat lector!* these last novels of Sartre are grim reminders that one cannot read Steinbeck and Dos Passos as great novelists with impunity.

L'Age de Raison, the first of the trilogy, manages at least to be interesting reading: it has some form, a single plot, rather skillfully contrived in parts, and one interesting character: a malicious homosexual who is fond of cats, disgusted physically by the presence of a pregnant girl, whom he nevertheless marries in order to satisfy his longings for self-torture. But what happens to this character is typical of the novel: Sartre is in too much of a hurry to make him fully credible, and he remains a kind of immense melodramatic caricature.

The novel affords, incidentally, a painful revelation that Sartre is well along the road to Stalinism. The noblest character in the book is a Communist, Brunet, who invites the hero to join the Party with the

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large-minded magnanimity of some saintly proselytizer for the Church: "The Party does not need you, you need the Party." Brunet is represented as a "real man," who, in contrast to the indecisive hero, has chosen himself and made his life a destiny.

What a destiny! This "real man" is, in fact, a poor boob who has let himself become a tool of the enemy of mankind, and by his participation in a party of gangsters and assassins becomes himself an assassin and gangster.

Will Sartre's trilogy end with the hero finding his "liberty" in the Communist Party? This political naïveté appears just as clearly in his magazine, *Les Temps Modernes,* which has so far failed to print anything unfavorable to Stalinism. Whether this be the result of naïveté or Stalinist pressure, I do not know, but the Communist Party will probably be just as well pleased to let Sartre keep his nominal, but favorable, independence. In New York the newspaper *PM* serves the Communist Party better than if it were directly published under the Party's banner.

In the second volume of the trilogy, *Le Sursis* (The Reprieve), the process of Sartre's decline proceeds further and faster. Form is completely relaxed, the novel is shapeless, flat, painfully dull to read—one of the worst books ever written by an author with talent. Sartre has pushed the panoramic novel of Jules Romains and Upton Sinclair to its final absurdity. The days of Munich, 1938, are represented by letting a great number of characters from all strata of society, none of whom has a personality or real story of his own, drift across the page. Sartre aimed perhaps to open the windows of the novel on the world in order to give an adequate feeling of Being-in-the-world in the existentialist sense; but instead he has kicked down the walls of the dwelling and the whole world streams across the scene. The imitative fallacy with a vengeance. It is like being thrown into a V-J Day mob in order to acquire a dense sense of the historical happening.

From these last novels it begins to be clear why Sartre has attacked Flaubert so viciously. The memory of Flaubert is his guilty conscience. If this appears too harsh, if I seem throughout to have been too severe on Sartre, I have wished only to hold him rigorously to the standards which his great talents, for philosophy and for literature, invite—to separate the writer from the limelight. The trouble may also be the result of the compulsion to be *engagé*. 'We write for our contemporaries, we wish to miss nothing in our age,' says Sartre; and in order to be sure it is his contemporaries for whom he is writing, he becomes a writer in a hurry, and in order to miss nothing, he attempts to ram the raw material of the days of Munich down the reader's throat. But precisely because we can never possess the whole of our historical epoch, this doctrine of *engagement* must be inverted: having, in any case, to resign himself to limitation and selection, the writer had better make necessity

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conscious: he has a responsibility to his art which compels him to be withdrawn. And as for writing for one's contemporaries—well, perhaps that brings us, at last, to the philosophical root of the doctrine.

Existentialism attempts to bring home to man the complete consciousness of his mortality; but, given his other temptations, the consciousness of death may be more than the writer can stand: in the face of an already assured success, to sacrifice his life for his work begins to appear a desperate folly; and death (as elsewhere in modern life) becomes the agent of nihilism. What we have, then, to oppose to the doctrine of *engagement* is another modern parable for the situation of the writer: Proust on the death of Bergotte.

WILLIAM BARRETT

THE MEANINGFULNESS OF ABSURDITY

LE MYTHE DE SISYPHE, ESSAI SUR L'ABSURDE. *Par Albert Camus. Gallimard.*

LE MALENTENDU. PIECE EN TROIS ACTES. CALIGULA. PIECE EN QUATRE ACTES. *Par Albert Camus. Gallimard.*

CAMUS' DOCTRINES have already been described so clearly by Hannah Arendt in *The Nation* for February 23 that a quotation from her essay will save time and space:

> "For Camus man is essentially a stranger because the world in general and man as man are not fitted for each other; that the are together makes the human condition an absurdity." "Man is essentially alone with his 'revolt' and his 'clairvoyance,' that is, with his reason, which makes him ridiculous because the gift of reason was bestowed upon him in a world 'where everything is given and nothing ever explained'."

The tempation to split hairs and indulge in logic-chopping about such doctrines is obvious. The important question is: what is the full significance of Camus' doctrines and how do they enter into his plays? The usual pitfall of the author who makes an explicit use of ideas or who is inspired to composition by ideas is what Henry James called "the platitude of mere statement," the direct declaration of the meanings involved in his subject. The result at its most extreme is the morality play, the allegory or the fable. When characters are given names like Prudence or Vice, the texture of the work and the particulars of time, place, and action are diminished, thin, or unreal. In his two plays Camus shows that he is well aware of this difficulty, although he does not always escape it. And in his essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus,* after saying that "the great novelists are philosophical novelists," he adds, "philosophical novelists, that is to say, exactly the contrary of writers with a thesis," the authors of problem-plays.

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However, if for the most part Camus' plays do not resemble as drama the products of such a problem-playwright as Bernard Shaw, the influence of his ideas upon his drama takes another more peculiar form: he allows the ideas in which he is interested to determine the nature of his subject-matter, where most authors can be said to let the subject-matter which has taken hold of their sensibility determine the ideas which their works contain. Balzac, cited by Camus as a philosophical novelist, was a Catholic, but he did not write Catholic novels; the ideas of *The Human Comedy* do not in the least resemble those of *The Divine Comedy*. And no one has ever been sure of just what ideas Shakespeare believed, among the many he used. Camus, however, chooses as his subjects the murder of a son by his mother and his sister, a murder the absurdity of which is heightened because the murderers do not know whom they are killing; and in *Caligula* he deals with the monstrous crimes of an emperor who is determined to commit every kind of crime in order to prove that he is superior to the gods and that there is no good and evil. Does this not suggest a lack of conviction in the absurdity of existence, or a desire to prove its absurdity by fastening upon the monstrous, the extraordinary, and the accidental? It is true enough that there are monstrous rulers and that a mother may from time to time murder her son without knowing that he is her son. But surely the absurdity of existence, if it is in essence absurd, makes itself manifest in *any* kind of situation. And thus an ordinary story of love and marriage ought to have more literary persuasiveness than any theme in which aberration, in the usual sense of the word, is the substance of the plot. If the world is one in which everything is given and nothing is ever explained, in which the very fact that man has the gift of reason and is thrown into a world of unreasoning things constitutes the absurdity of existence, then surely what is daily, usual, ordinary and never celebrated in newspaper headlines ought to be the proper subject-matter of the absurd or existential author.

I emphasize this point not because I think that the literary critic can get very far by discussing what *should* have been an author's proper subject-matter, but for the sake of showing that Camus is superior to his ideas; and the truth of his ideas, insofar as they are true, is temporal and not metaphysical. At the start of *Sisyphus,* Camus declares "Il n'y a qu'un problème philosophique vraiment sérieux: le suicide." It would follow that much of the history of philosophy has concerned itself with what is not serious, what is trivial, and perhaps pointless. "Juger que la vie vaut ou ne vaut pas la peine d'être véçue, c'est repondre à la question fondamentale philosophique," he continues, "Le reste, si le monde a trois dimensions, si l'esprit a neuf ou douze catègories, vient ensuite." But there are other serious and fundamental philosophical questions, and the very way in which Camus states what he considers the subordinate or auxiliary problems of philosophy is rhetorical

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and inaccurate. The question of whether the world has three dimensions may not be a philosophical problem at all; and no one seriously inquires as to whether the mind has nine or twelve categories. What is the good life? What is the good state? What am I? What can I know? What ought I to do? Does God exist? These are serious and fundamental philosophical problems. And insofar as the problem of suicide is not a psychological one, it is a question settled when these prior problems are settled. In *The Myth of Sisyphus,* Camus quotes Dostoevsky's description of *The Brothers Karamazov*: "The principal question which will be pursued in every part of this book is the very one from which I have suffered consciously or unconsciously throughout my life: the existence of God." Faced with this serious and fundamental problem of a great philosophical novelist, Camus attempts to transform Dostoevsky's question into something consistent with his own views by saying that the Russian author did not write "une oeuvre absurde," but a work "qui pose le problème absurde." But the best he can do to make Dostoevsky say what he himself is trying to say is to cite a critic who declared that Dostoevsky identified himself with Ivan Karamazov. And then, as further evidence, Camus adds that the religious passages in *The Brothers Karamazov* required three months of effort while the blasphemous portions were written in three weeks and in a state of exaltation! As if it

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were a question of time or exaltation! Camus himself appears to be unconvinced by his argument, for he concludes by maintaining that in *The Possessed,* where the problem of suicide is posed, Dostoevsky failed to recognize the essential absurdity of existence because he raised the problem of immortality: "ce qui contredit l'absurde dans cette oeuvre, ce n'est pas son caractère chrétien, c'est l'annonce qu'elle fait de la vie future." The dissociation of Christianity and immortality is interesting, original, and false; and the reader will remember that one remarkable character in *The Possessed,* Kirillov, finds the problems of God, immortality, and suicide inseparable; he decides to commit suicide because he had *previously* decided that God and immortality are merely the "pain of the fear of death."

Dostoevsky wrote in Czarist Russia. Camus has lived through the German occupation of France. That is why the problem of suicide—of resisting the Gestapo, or collaborating with the Germans, or joining the underground—seems to be the only serious problem. And when, at the end of his essay, he singles out the myth of Sisyphus (let us remember that the Greeks esteemed quite different myths) and salutes Sisyphus as the absurd hero, the man who endlessly rolls a rock up a hill only to have it roll down endlessly, he is saluting the heroes of the French underground who struggled against the Germans when it seemed that the struggle was endless, hopeless, and absurd, absurd in Camus' new sense that it was a matter of human pride to resist the Germans, god-like in power, even though the struggle seemed to have no chance of success. But the struggle, as it turns out, was not hopeless; and if God exists and there is a future life, then human life, since it does not terminate with death, may not be absurd. There are also other reasons for maintaining that it is not without meaning. In any case, it should be clear that one fundamental question, the question which Camus begs, is the problem: Is existence absurd or is it meaningful? Does God exist or is he an illusion? Camus has merely formulated a modern version of Stoicism, inspired by his age just as the Stoics were inspired by the conditions of their own period. Camus' ideas are valuable not as a description of existence, but as a description of certain states of existence; and they are valuable above all as a means necessary to the interpretation of an extremely gifted playwright's experience.

This is not the first nor the last time that the truth or falsity of an author's ideas are less important than the fact that his ideas make possible a grasp of experience and the composition of first-rate literary works.

DELMORE SCHWARTZ

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FRONTIERS OF CRITICISM

LES SANDALES D'EMPEDOCLE: ESSAI SUR LES LIMITES DE LA LITTERATURE. *By Claude-Edmonde Magny. Neuchatel, Switzerland: Editions de la Baconnière,* 1945.

IN DEFINING the limits of literary criticism, Mlle. Magny begins by rejecting the "fiction" of the objective, universal point of view assumed by whoever hands down an aesthetic judgment. She then goes on to cast suspicion on aesthetic judgments in general: they lack probative foundation and in any case have led to more error than truth. Mlle. Magny misunderstands Kant profoundly and thus fails to realize that whether or not a reader expressly delivers himself of an aesthetic judgment, he automatically makes one, conscious or unconscious, whenever he consumes a piece of literature for pleasure. The critic in particular is required to make himself aware of such judgments and speak of them aloud: it is part of his task and at the same time one of his credentials.

Her method, Mlle. Magny asserts, coincides with the "limits" of criticism. The most criticism can do is extract and translate into abstract terms what the literary artist has embodied in situations, personages, metaphors, rhythms, word order, tense, punctuation, etc. The aesthetic test boils down to a determination of the internal coherence of what is thus extracted and of the appropriateness of the artistic means to the abstract content. In order, however, to arrive at this determination it is self-evidently necessary for Mlle. Magny to assume as objective and universal a point of view as she can and to strip herself as much as possible of her biographical or psychological particularities. Thus she is forced to return to the position she tried in the beginning to abandon.

But it remains that for her the principal activity of literary criticism is hermeneutic, interpretative; its role is that of a midwife— maieutic. Mlle. Magny finds content inextricably associated with such formal details as tense and punctuation, and offers evidence for this in some remarkable perceptions that are enough in themselves to make her book worth reading. Yet she makes the mistake of assuming, in practice if not in theory, that the formal factors in a work of art remain exclusively formal until their meaning or intention penetrates our clear consciousness; they stay separate from content as long as their relation to it is not capable of being exhibited conceptually. I should like to point out, however, that every work of art has an unconscious or pre-conscious effect, and this effect also constitutes part of its content.

Fallacies similar to this are responsible for the occasional superficiality of Mlle. Magny's critical method. That method may serve brilliantly to pry out Charles Morgan's or Sartre's or Kafka's "metaphysic,"

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but it places all three writers on the same level of consideration. It may arrange them hierarchically on this level—with Kafka first and Morgan last—but even this will be misleading, since the most important differences between the three are precisely matters of level. As it is, Simenon or Marquand could go through the hopper of Mlle. Magny's method without necessarily revealing their shoddiness. They might even issue from it improved. For while Mlle. Magny's method can seldom reduce the importance of the work of literature to which it is applied, it can often exaggerate that importance; as it does when it inflates and dignifies Sartre's rather weak short stories out of all proportion by extracting the philosophical intentions they embody and disregarding their less tangible aspects. The very process of criticism here amounts to a purification and transcendence. Suddenly, with their unconvincing or banal plots and characterizations left behind, the ghosts of Sartre's short stories shine forth with a brilliance their living flesh never owned.

Yet it is the merit of her book and that which makes it worth discussion that, within the limitations of her method, Mlle. Magny's sharp and sensitive intelligence produces a maximum result. In addressing herself directly to the literary object, she sees subtly and profoundly, even if in the end she fails to place the whole object correctly. She detects the arbitrariness with which Morgan saddles metaphysics on his

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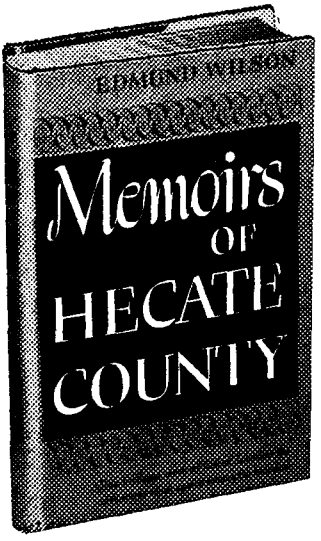

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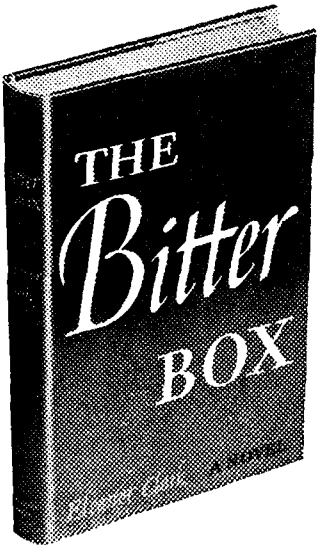

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novels—even if she fails to point out how faded and stale that pseudo-Platonic metaphysics is. She well perceives the fallacy in Sartre's attempt to assert philosophical conclusions on the basis of psychological, subjective deductions; even more, she sees that *La Nausée* is jottings from a journal mixed with bits of fiction—that its insufficiency comes from a confusion of genres (although she does not see that a formal philosophical thesis is out of place in fiction only when it compels the progression to be logical instead of dramatic). Mlle. Magny sums up Sartre's case with the remark: "In any case, as long as he presents himself to us as a novelist and story-teller he lacks the right to impose on us his own view of the world to the exclusion of every other."

In the first of her two excellent essays on Kafka, Mlle. Magny discards, correctly, those interpretations of his work that would *reduce* it to a religious or any other kind of allegory. Affirming that Kafka's very concrete method is applied to concrete situations and that the latter manifest in their concreteness the profoundest aspects of his art, no matter how much they may welcome exegesis, anagogical interpretation or psychoanalysis, she subjects Kafka to the most thorough, perceptive and well-balanced, if sometimes repetitious, analysis I have yet seen him receive. Here her method comes fully into its own—or almost fully, for it does overlook a factor that is of major importance in explaining Kafka: the history of both the society and the literature that led up to him.

Toward the close of her second essay on Kafka we discover, however, what Mlle. Magny has been leading up to. We begin to understand why she dwells so long on the inconsistencies of Morgan's and Sartre's metaphysics.

Kafka's metaphysics, she says, is incomplete, if not inconsistent—it contains no God or justifying principle. Thus, along with Morgan and Sartre, he too is a philosopher of despair. Most literature, Mlle. Magny continues, speaks a philosophy of despair today. But what is wrong is not so much the despair as the illegitimate claim literature has been making more and more frequently since Rimbaud to be a means, if not the principal means, of extending experience, of creating philosophy, of mastering the whole extent of knowledge, and even of grasping the absolute. Yet literature, she counters in the last essay of her book, is not "co-extensive with the life of the mind." Given the total realm of consciousness as field, abstract thought, or philosophy, functions more fruitfully and more honestly. A work of fiction has not the right to make such a sweeping conclusion as is expressed in total despair, because the evidence it brings to bear is too partial and too distorted by concerns that have nothing to do with the objective truth.

Mlle. Magny goes on to say that literature today, because it arrogates to itself the tasks of philosophy or religion, suffers from a confusion of genres, of which Sartre's novel *La Nausée* is a typical case. *La Nausée* is more the description of a "phenomenological experience" than a work

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of fiction; the attitude to which its hero is gradually brought—that absolute existence is the only thing to be taken in earnest, while all the specific, contingent forms of existence are but so many ludicrous or "obscene" lies—is too general (also too arrogantly general) and at the same time too partial to justify itself as the resolution of a novel: it belongs at the end of a chain of reasoning rather than of a chain of acts and emotions.

In my opinion Mlle. Magny not only exaggerates the seriousness of the situation—in a way she actually creates that seriousness by taking certain claims, among them those of the Existentialist writers in France, too much at their face value. The shortcomings of Sartre's art or of Kafka's philosophy are not enough to constitute the crisis she sees. (There is a crisis indeed but it is a different one.) True, the German Romantics and Rilke, George, the Surrealists and such critics as Roland de Renéville have expounded the notion that art is a means of attaining to experience of the absolute. But no thinkers, as distinct from artists and critics, have ever made or taken this claim as seriously or as literally as some members of the Parisian avant-garde now seem to think—not even Schelling.

The novelist-philosophers at whom Mlle. Magny aims her book do not, in any case, write the way they do simply because they lay claim to the wider province of philosophy; but rather because literature, like all other contemporary art, is on the hunt for a set of oecumenical beliefs more substantial than those with which society—or religion—now supply it. It does no more good to tell literature to call off this hunt than it does to exhort poetry—Roger Caillois did somewhere—to stop striving for purity. The hunt, as well as the purity, is socially, politically, philosophically, aesthetically—in short, historically compelled.

Mlle. Magny's failure to pose the problem correctly is owed, like Caillois' similar failure, to neglect of the historical factor. It is this neglect that accounts for much of what I venture to call the backwardness of recent French criticism. The problems of literature are never historical in themselves, but history does determine which of them are to be placed on the order of the day. And unless history is taken into account they cannot be adequately understood.

CLEMENT GREENBERG

POET AND/OR COMMISSAR

ARAGON: POET OF THE FRENCH RESISTANCE. *Edited by Hannah Josephson and Malcolm Cowley. Duell, Sloan and Pearce.* $2.00.

WHATEVER ELSE Louis Aragon's position may have been in the French Resistance, this book makes it clear that he was not—as the title would have us believe—the "poet of the French Resistance."

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are from *Le Crève-Coeur* and *Les Yeux d'Elsa,* both written during the first period of the war and occupation, before the German attack in the East had terminated the Hitler-Stalin pact.

These poems are at the same time violently personal and dispiritedly defeatist. Their defeatism has in it the same listlessness that pervaded the Stalinist line of that period, half-heartedly attempting to cloak its accord with Hitler by making formal comparisons with the last war:

We fetch our habits after twenty years
From oblivion's cloakroom. A thousand prisoners
Make the old gestures, stiff and obsolete. . . .

Malcolm Cowley's introduction disingenuously attempts to disguise this Stalinist-engendered defeatism by claiming that Aragon, "during the first months of idleness and skepticism at the front . . . spoke for them [the soldiers of France] directly in their bewilderment. . . ."

But Aragon's defeatism-on-command, crudely conceived and lackadaisically felt, was incapable of providing his poetry with enough inspiration to last even until the next turn in the party line. He, whose talents are primarily public and journalistic, forlornly restricted by his party to a marginal area of subject matter and to a marginal area of literary activity by the army, turned with a vengeance to the purely personal.

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In poem after poem, in one bitter sentimentality after another, Aragon, "swerving" from the war to the "shadow of her" he loves, bewails the war's violation of his personal life:

Ah, speak to me of love, waves, little waves
For even the heart in shadow has its cries
Ah, speak to me of love. We spend the days
Doubting, foreboding, writing to ourselves
Ah, speak of love while letters make their slow
Round trip from Paris to this wilderness.

The phrase "parlez-moi d'amour," sounded insistently throughout this poem, by evoking the bathos of the popular song, is intended to create a bitter and pathetic irony, but ends up by merely being bathetic itself, when Aragon surrenders to the very emotion at whose expense the irony was intended. And this is so in spite of a tendency, particularly in the translations of Humphries and Cowley, to disguise the more indulgent sentimentality of the original French.

There is an unseemliness and lack of proportion in these wild and extravagant lamentations. The poems manifest, though quite elegantly, the same paranoiac infantilism that characterized so many of the soldiers of this war, who conceived of it as a vast conspiracy solely intended to frustrate their personal lives:

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Absence abominable absinthe de la guerre
N'en es-tu pas encore amerèment grisée
Nos jambes se mêlaient t'en souviens-tu naguère
Et je savais pour toi ce que ton corps faisait

(As with so much of Aragon's poetry, what begins as a good phrase trails off into merely ordinary verse.) And always there is the forlorn dream of the return to the old life, whose symbol is some dull but *heimisch* banality out of the past (crossword puzzles in Aragon's case). In this sense Cowley is correct when he asserts that Aragon "spoke" for the soldiers—but on a level of awareness no higher than their own.

The later, "patriotic" Aragon of the Resistance is certainly not the same as the defeatist and personal Aragon of the mobilization and defeat. It is the poetry of the earlier Aragon, however, that is read, while it is the public role of the later that is acclaimed. The poetry of the "patriotic" Aragon is tumescent and tasteless and—with superior chicness—it is guilty of the same "mechanical phrases" and "imbecile hi-de-ho heard once too often on the radio" that he condemned in his defeatist verse.

What, after all, is the real character of Aragon's patriotism? One remains convinced of his willingness to drop it—as he dropped it during the defeatist period—at a word from Moscow. One is surely not dealing here with traditional loyalty to *patrie,* an emotion acknowledging subservience to nothing else. If patriotism is the question, then Aragon is, like all Stalinists, a Russian patriot. His country, France, is in the last analysis merely the locale of his private life and pleasures. And it is in this sense only that Aragon is a "patriot." In the army and in the Resistance, Aragon is the celebrant of civilian life. It is not the mockery of justice—what one would think the proper concern of the spokesman of an oppressed nation—but the denial of pleasure that brings him to his highest pitch of eloquence:

Whether at sunset or at dawn
The skies are colorless and wan
Spring dies among the flower stalls
Bright Paris of my youth, farewell
I am monarch of my sorrows still

We are all, in this sense, patriots of the places of our enjoyment. Aragon's dishonesty consists in the attempt to inflate emotions essentially private in their scope into a national and political cause.

Some sedentary intellectuals in England and the United States, sensitive to the injunction to "do something!" and tired at last of the isolation of the avant-garde, have, by transference of their own unfulfilled longings, elevated Aragon to the post of bardic captain of his people. Malcolm Cowley writes in his introduction: "The poet here [in England and the United States], whether soldier or civilian, usually

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writes not only as an individual, but also as one opposed to the mass of his countrymen. When he says 'I,' he means specifically the 'not-they,' the not-as-other-men. Aragon as an individual spoke in his wartime poems for all patriotic Frenchmen: when he said 'I,' he also meant 'we'."

The poets of the Resistance, as the spokesmen of European freedom, were indeed, fleetingly, in a position that permitted them the employment of such a "we." But this is precisely where Aragon is found most wanting. Aragon substitutes a two-faced patriotism for the socialist and internationalist aspirations associated with the Resistance. Aragon's "we" is simply the debased "we" of a renegade avant-gardist, pompously presuming on the existence of a nationalist common ground, full of Stalinist longings to "belong."

Louis Aragon is a poet not without talent and certainly not without interest. Some of his poems—"The Unoccupied Zone" for example—are good, but only when their scope is limited: within narrow confines his imagination can work out its theme in uncorrupted simplicity. Aragon has energy and fluency but he lacks honesty and character.

It must be added at this point that although Aragon's work is to be evaluated in terms of poetry alone, the defects of that work are closely connected with the defects of his character and with the ominous significance of his present role in France as the literary leader of the political "avant-garde." It is important to make clear just what sort of person he is. He is, let us not forget, the same man who called for the execution of André Gide—(whom Cowley quotes in praise of Aragon, midly observing at the same time that Aragon attacked Gide " . . . unjustly, I think. . . .") Gide, of course, stands in no direct personal danger of the realization of Aragon's demand. What is frightening in this, however, is Aragon's impudence in calling for a Moscow trial in Paris. Such "patriotic" fervor is more of a threat to the critical intelligence now than it was to the German occupation then.

One is amazed that the people who edited this book could discover in a versifying Vishinsky the "Poet of the Resistance."

MARTIN GREENBERG

AN INTERNATIONAL EPISODE

ALTHOUGH THE modern American novel has been popular in France for some years, its vogue has grown enormously since the war. Most of Faulkner has been translated, together with a good deal of Hemingway, Caldwell, Steinbeck and smaller portions of Farrell, Saroyan and Katherine Anne Porter. In addition, Gide, Malraux, Sartre and many other French critics have commented on the Americans with great ingenuity and enthusiasm.

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I suppose that De Voto, Brooks and Adams will feel that this taste for a rough and unpatriotic American realism is simply perverse. But to most readers it will seem fair enough, especially in view of the comparative impotence of the European novel since the 1920's. Recent American writing does exhibit "an atmosphere of freshness and liveliness, a new way of knowing and feeling, a source of new propositions for an existence," as an anonymous critic in the French magazine *Confluences* lately asserted. Yet this critic has his reservations: he says that the Americans depict life in a way which is original but "not always authentic or profound." And Malraux, too, in saying that "the high stakes for which this literature will play will be to become intellectualized without losing its direct grip," seems to be conscious of its limitations as well as its powers.

Other French critics are not so judicious. In face of their frequent extravagances the American novelist must sometimes feel that he is being given a testimonial dinner under the impression that he is Cervantes. The praise falls, moreover, alike on the second-rate and the first-rate, on Steinbeck as on Faulkner. And the reasons for the vogue are not always as pleasing to the national literary ego as they might seem to be.

The political reasons are obvious and in the long run not very important. In an interview printed in 1940 Malraux envisaged American literature as a vital part of an "Atlantic culture" which should embrace the Americas and the countries of western Europe. If we recall Malraux's inveterate facility at translating political necessities into humanist slogans, we can see how his idea of an Atlantic culture answered to the practical needs of an alarmingly weak and isolated France.

But there are deeper reasons for the popularity of the American novel in France. Certain of the younger French writers are today preoccupied with what they regard as an irreconcilable tension between the claims of the personal and the social; and as H. J. Kaplan said of this movement in a recent PARTISAN REVIEW: "Any history of its origin would be concerned with the influence of the American novel." In other words, the American novel is esteemed in France because, as the product of the most advanced industrial nation, it affords particularly powerful images of the brutal milieux and lonely heroes, the alienation and dehumanization, which are typical of the present world in general. It is something of this sort that Jean-Francois Ricard seems to discover in Faulkner. "Among the inhuman there will exist at least one being who will be human: oneself. And then, in the same world, at the some moment, this no longer results in chance, it results in fatality. Pure fatality, the only palpable kind, not external, nor social, because when one is confronted by society one can elude it or accept it or humble oneself before it. But although Faulkner's heroes would like to accept

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it, their power is stronger than their good will. Sartoris, Popeye, Joe Christmas, rise up, attack, are not understood, destroy what they love, kill and are killed—because they are themselves. Thus is achieved a regeneration, a novelistic incarnation, of fatality, by virtue of showing that it is not in the gods or in society but in the individual, in whatever is immutably given within himself. . . ."

But Ricard seems to make better sense of Faulkner's experience than Faulkner, with all his power, makes of it himself; and a similar disposition to over-interpret, over-subtilize, over-intellectualize, is true of much of the French comment on American fiction. What the critics do is to translate into general ideas what is merely implicit in the novels—if it is there at all. And it is significant that a great deal of this criticism also concerns itself with American movies and other popular arts, which are likewise made to serve as poignant witnesses to the human condition. In short it is never quite clear whether to the French the American novel is merely an assemblage of vivid data or whether it is a work of art.

Evidently the very distinction is a matter of widespread indifference. Jean-Paul Sartre has said that, unlike Faulkner, "Proust is a classic and a Frenchman: the French may lose themselves over the week-end but they always conclude by finding themselves again." And he added that "eloquence, the taste for clear ideas, intellectualism, constrained Proust to preserve at least the appearance of chronology" and of logical co-

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herence in general. But the curious thing is that this seems to have been said more in praise of Faulkner than of Proust, as if the capacity to lose oneself, to dispense with clear ideas, eloquence, intellectualism and the other ornaments of the classical French spirit was to Sartre rather desirable.

And Gide seems to think along similar lines. Gide, it is true, has a long record as a critic for whom enthusiasm and the passion of appropriation predominate over judgment. His readings in foreign literatures have been an extended *voyage au Congo* from which he is apt to bring back only what is usable to the French mind. The resulting injustices and distortions have been many. If he embraced Dostoevsky it was only after fitting him out with a neat and Gidean rationale; if he rejected Henry James it was because James, being a refined craftsman, had nothing to offer the craft-surfeited French. No wonder that in his recent *Imaginary Interviews* Gide plays fast and loose with the modern Americans. After saying that some of Steinbeck's stories "equal or surpass the best tales of Chekhov" he goes on to praise Dashiell Hammett. Somewhat reluctantly he admits that Hammett "is doubtless not in the same class as the four great figures we began by discussing [Faulkner, Hemingway, Caldwell, Steinbeck]," but he adds that "I regard *Red Harvest* as a remarkable achievement, the last word in atrocity, cynicism and horror." A person need not be an embattled classicist to wonder at these reasons for admiring a book.

Gide and Sartre are perhaps only amusing themselves, letting themselves go. Perhaps the nation that produced a Proust has earned the right—that is to say, the irresponsibility—to prefer a Faulkner, and remains so certain of finding itself in the end that it can afford to dream of losing itself for the present. But I should guess that the American vogue indicated not so much a triumph for ourselves as some crisis in French taste and reason. It would require more knowledge of France than I possess to say what this crisis might be.

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